LIKE SHIPS UPON THE SEA.

VOL. II.

LIKE SHIPS UPON THE SEA

A Novel.

BY

FRANCES ELEANOR TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF

"AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE," "A CHARMING FELLOW,"
"AMONG ALIENS," ETC., ETC.

"We twain have met like ships upon the sea."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL,
LIMITED.
1883.

Hungay:
CLAY AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS.

LIKE SHIPS UPON THE SEA.

CHAPTER I.

THE *Tribune of the People* uplifted its voice, metaphorically speaking, for a very ungrateful client. The People cared nothing about it, very seldom read it, and when they did read it, were bored by it. They preferred the *Star of Progress*, which, equally democratic, was much more amusing and popular. The public has a quick, suspicious sense of any attempt to disguise moral, philosophical, or political teaching in what is supposed to be an alluring form adapted to its rudimentary capacities. It resents all such attempts with a sense of injury, as a child resents bitter powders lurking insidiously in jam. The result is generally to spoil the jam without mitigating the powder.

Some such suspicion attended the perusal of the *Tribune of the People*. It was not only instructive and *doctrinaire*, but it attempted to assume a playful

manner of being so. Its liveliest sallies were mistrusted as a siren song, in the style of

> "Dilly, dilly, dilly, dilly,
> Co—ome and be killed!"

and were not found to be seductive. Readers looked for a lurking moral in its lightest paragraphs, and fancied they found one whether it were there or not. The *Tribune of the People* did not gravely enunciate commonplaces easily grasped by the average mind as if they were profound reflections addressed only to select intellects, whereby the reader is naturally pleased on finding that he comprehends them with facility. Neither did it print wordy columns of social philosophy which were not comprehensible at all, but the like of which are often loudly eulogized on a principle similar to that which made the courtiers in the story-book so fervently admire the embroidered robe of the King standing before them *in puris naturalibus*. Neither did it deal in scandalous stories, nor scatter broadcast shameful imputations with a light *insouciance* which suggested that the writers held their own reputation by an easy tenure, and were fearless of reprisals which could scarcely give them a worse character than they already possessed. It was not dogmatic, nor hazy, nor slanderous. It condescendingly offered its powders in

spoonfuls of jam; and although avowedly a political paper, it did not hold through thick and thin with any political party.

Moreover, there was about the whole tone of the journal something indefinably *dilettante*. It displayed that ineradicable defect common to the amateur in every department of human effort, namely, a sanguine expectation of achieving results without previous preparation, which recalls the modest gentleman who said that he did not know whether he could or could not play upon the fiddle, because he had never tried. And so long as the amateur appeals to society *as* an amateur, he may confidently reckon on success. We are most of us acquainted in private life with vocalists whose performances are preferred by their friends to those of Madame Patti; violinists quite equal to Herr Joachim; painters before whom Mr. Millais must pale his ineffectual palette; and poets who would make the topmost reputation in contemporary literature totter on its throne, *if* they ever should appear in print. But happily for Art and artists, these same individuals when addressed collectively as the Great Public, have a very different standard; and ceasing to be surprised that the animal can stand on its hind legs at all, imperatively require that he should stand well.

Mario Masi had a quick intelligence, a fairly good

command of his own language, and a considerable gift of raillery. But these are but a slender stock-in-trade for editing a newspaper. That enterprise, indeed, has been known to be successfully conducted by individuals possessing not one of the three. But then they had other more essential qualifications which Masi lacked: experience, an apprenticeship to journalism, a sure perception of what will "do" and what will not, arrived at by long habit, and by the slow but sure method of trying and failing and trying again. Now Mario was ready to try; perfectly ready. But he was by no means ready not to succeed. And when, after the first intoxicating joys of seeing his own lucubrations in print and hearing the *Tribune of the People* bawled about the streets by the itinerant vendors, he was brought face to face with sundry troubles and annoyances inseparable from his calling, he jibbed, and became angry and discouraged. And the most unpromising feature in the case was that he was not chiefly troubled by what reasonably might have troubled him: the fewness of his subscribers, and the gradual dropping off of chance sales; but by the onslaughts of his brother journalists (which Guarini assured him were excellent advertisements), and by any casual expression of unfavourable opinion which happened to come to his ears.

In Italy the journalist has not always the refuge of

muffling himself in that Cloak of Darkness, the anonymous and irresponsible "we." It is not obligatory on him to sign his contributions, but neither is it considered a breach of professional etiquette to name the writer of an article when he is widely known. And let any of our public instructors consider within himself whether it would not make a considerable difference to his comfort if, instead of being discussed under the form of an impersonal abstraction, such as the morning *Aurora* or the evening *Hesperus*, he were liable to be publically contradicted and pooh-poohed as the "chronically ill-informed Mr. John Smith," the "pretentiously ignorant Mr. Thomas Jones," or the "spitefully disingenuous Mr. William Brown." Mario Masi would have fought half-a-dozen duels within as many days in the beginning of his editorship, if Gino Peretti had not kept watch and ward over him, and flattered, and coaxed, and told him a variety of sugary falsehoods. Peretti was strongly interested in starting the *Tribune of the People* with an effective burst; and that had been achieved. For Peretti in this matter all would be well that began well. He had never looked forward to a prolonged existence for the paper; and if it powerfully directed public attention to the Pontine Marshes Drainage and Amelioration Company, it would have done all he demanded of it.

Nina Guarini's negotiations with Prince Massimo Nasoni had resulted in the sale to the company (on advantageous terms for the latter) of the Prince's property at Mattoccia. In accordance with her husband's advice, she had demanded a price for her services. And casting about for a way to make the transaction useful to Masi and Violet (for whose sake, in fact, she had undertaken it), she resolved to stipulate with Peretti that a certain number of shares should be handed over to Masi as an acknowledgment of what he had done for the cause in his capacity of editor of the *Tribune of the People*. After some deliberation, she made up her mind to tell Peretti the truth: that she was interested in the lady Masi was going to marry, that she wished to help them, that Masi's pride would never allow him to accept the shares as a gift from her hands, and that, therefore, she took this method of transferring them to him. "My name had better not be mentioned in the transaction," she had said to Peretti. "You can make over the shares as if from yourself."

This Peretti agreed to readily enough, being willing to take credit to himself even "for the sunshine in July," as the Italian proverb pithily puts it. As to the Signora Nina's motives, however, for this bit of generosity, he did not altogether believe her statement. But, true or untrue, it was no business of his. He

said a word or two to sound Beppe Guarini on the subject, but Beppe declined to enter into it.

"I gave my wife *carte blanche* to do as she pleased," said he. "She has managed the affair for you with her usual tact and success, and I only hope she drove a hard bargain with the company. If she chooses to spend part of her gains in making presents instead of buying earrings for herself, I have nothing to say against it."

Gino Peretti was a little disappointed to find that Guarini knew all about the matter. He would have liked to take down Nina somewhat in her husband's estimation. However, he could but smile in a superior way, and murmur something about women having their foolish caprices sometimes. And he forthwith wrote to announce to Masi that fifty shares in the Pontine Marshes Company had been made over to him. And in the fervour of composition he made so great a flourish about his own liberality as would make it difficult to confess afterwards that he had only been acting as the almoner of some one else.

But the fact of the sale of Prince Nasoni's land was kept strictly secret for the present among the small knot of persons interested. Peretti was in no hurry to announce it, since he could vaunt the exceptional advantages connected with the draining

of Mattoccia without appearing to cry up his own property. Prince Nasoni was in no hurry, for sundry good reasons, one of them being a dislike to his creditors' knowing that he had come into possession of a sum of ready money, and another—and by no means the least—a dread of his mother's reproaches when she should hear that he had surreptitiously parted with another fragment of the rapidly-dwindling family estates.

As to his son, the Duke of Pontalto, the Prince troubled himself not a jot. When he did think of him, it was generally with a pleasant anticipation of the young man's discomfiture when the truth should break upon him. And so Don Ciccio remained ignorant of the transaction, which ignorance led him into a disagreeable position.

His late spiritual director, Don Silvestro, a clerical gentleman of considerable ability, who was now a main prop of the reactionary journal, the *Messenger of Peace*, in Naples, continued to follow up his first article on the subject of the Pontine Marshes scheme by a series of papers strongly recommending it, if it could be put into the right hands, and pointing out how necessary to its accomplishment would be the possession of a certain portion of land in the midst of a most fever-stricken district. The *Messenger of Peace*

never mentioned Mattoccia. It mentioned a variety of other places in the neighbourhood, but never said one syllable of Mattoccia. But it circumscribed the possibilities of making a wrong guess as to the whereabouts of the bit of land in question by giving accurate topographical details of its position. "And," said the *Messenger of Peace*, "were the company once in possession of this special bit of land, the success of their operations would be as good as assured. But could the company get possession of it?" That was what the *Messenger of Peace* strongly doubted, unless indeed the company could be composed of elements more trustworthy than at present appeared, or unless, at all events, its list of directors could be leavened with the names of one or two pious, honourable, and noble Romans—men who, disdaining to come to a transaction with the revolution, had ever maintained, &c., &c., &c.

These articles made some sensation in "Black" circles. Several distinguished members of that society hankered after fuller information on the subject of the Pontine Marshes scheme; and more than one, when the shares were announced for sale, boldly invested money in the affair, encouraged by the recommendation of so trustworthy an authority as the *Messenger of Peace*. It was hinted even that the Carlovingi—perhaps the leading family of their party in Rome, claiming a direct

descent from King Pepin, and having a less apocryphal hold on the consideration of mankind by the possession of an enormous fortune, inherited from one of the successors of the poor Fisherman—even the Carlovingis were said, figuratively, to have dipped rather deeply into the Pontine Marshes; and this rumour put the shares up with a rush. The infection extended to other social spheres. Fashionable gentlemen of Liberal politics, and fashionable ladies of no politics at all, talked of the scheme at the clubs, and in boudoirs, and salons, and opera boxes, and showed themselves no less greedy of gain than their fellow-creatures of the opposite party. Whether there was on any side much serious expectation that the peasant of those pestilential districts would be benefited by the scheme, or that any good whatever would accrue from it to any human being but the shareholders, may be doubted. But there was this difference observable: that whilst the "Blacks" expatiated on the impossibility of any good being done to the peasant, save by themselves; and whilst the "Reds" violently insisted on the indifference towards the peasant of everybody but *them*selves; the purely fashionable portion of society appeared to overlook the necessity of doing him any good at all, and dismissed unpleasant considerations connected with disease, and hunger, and ignorance,

as being distinctly not their business, and requiring to be got rid of and smothered under the disinfecting influences of the newest perfume and the latest French operetta.

Thus, however, through one channel and another, from one motive and another, under one aspect and another, the Pontine Marshes Drainage and Amelioration Company was in the mouths of a great many persons in Rome in those days, and excited a great deal of envy, hatred, malice, and uncharitableness. There were polemics about it in the newspapers (a boon to editors hard up for "copy" in that slack season!), and the wildest and most inconsistent stories respecting its origin, aims, and promoters, were rife everywhere. Mario Masi upheld the cause of the Company in perfect good faith, and when the popular interest in the matter was at its height Nina Guarini earnestly advised him to sell his shares. "I told you," she said, "that it would be fatal to hold after the good moment had come. It has come, but it will not last."

This was in the evening of the day when she had seen Violet, and Mario had called at the Guarinis to get his lady-love's address. It had been agreed that he should do so. Kitty Low had returned in the course of the day with a message from the Signora, importing that Miss Baines had found her old lodging

unoccupied, and had taken it; and Mario was now on his way thither. But he did not show that eager haste which might have been expected under the circumstances. He lingered, talking, and discussing various matters with Nina, and combating her view as to the desirability of immediately getting rid of the shares.

"They will go higher yet, Signora Nina," said he. "I am a little behind the scenes in these affairs now, my friend; I *have* to be, you know. And I can assure you that they will go up."

It was piteous to her to see him thus elated by the importance of his editorial position, and pluming himself on his intimate knowledge of matters about which he was so inexperienced as to be absolutely at the mercy of a man like Peretti. But she saw that it was necessary to be cautious.

"His vanity," thought she, "will take alarm if he thinks I am assuming more knowledge of these matters than he has. Heaven help us, what a knowledge to be proud of! And how gladly I would relinquish mine, if I could get back the price I paid for it!" Then she sighed out half aloud, "Ah, poor thing; poor thing!" And it need scarcely be said that this ejaculation did not apply to Mario Masi.

He, meanwhile, reached Miss Baines's old quarters, and was admitted by Mariuccia in her wide-latticed

stay bodice and short skirt, who addressed him with a loud and hoarse salutation like a boatswain's hail, and seemed in her hospitable welcome and display of good fellowship to be very near slapping him on the back.

Violet was in the little sitting-room when he entered it. At the sound of the opening door she turned round, sprang up with a little cry, and ran into his arms. There was something so innocent, confiding, and loving in the action, and in her little fluttering cry, "Oh Mario, oh Mario!"—something so expressive of her faith in him and her devotion to him, that he was moved more deeply than was his wont, and pressed his lips on her bright hair as her head rested for a moment against his breast, not only tenderly but reverently. The next moment his glance alighted on Kitty Low, who had risen from her chair, and stood, with some needlework in her hand, attentively regarding him.

Mario released Violet from his embrace, and whispered to her hurriedly in Italian, "Who is she? What is she doing here?"

Violet raised her blushing face on which some happy tears were shining, and answered him in English, "This is Kitty Low, my aunt's maid. I have mentioned her in my letters, you know. I had forgotten you were there, Kitty, for the moment. I am engaged to marry Captain Masi. I was engaged to him before

I went home. But it is a secret for the present from every one. I know you will keep it faithfully."

"I'm not much given to talking anyway, Miss Violet; and when you trust me with a secret you can depend on me," answered Kitty quietly. But she was not unmoved; and she looked again at Masi's face with a keener attention than before.

For his part he was not well pleased at having this stranger forced into his confidence. In the first place, he had very little faith in her silence. In the next place, he objected to feel that he was in her power. She might choose to betray him to Violet's uncle. However, there was no help for it now. And he could not reproach Violet in the first moments of their *réunion* for heedlessly betraying their secret, especially since that betrayal had arisen from an impulse of her strong affection for him.

Kitty discreetly withdrew, saying that she would go and see if Miss Baines wanted her; and the lovers were left alone.

"Why do you have such an ugly woman for your maid?" was Masi's first question when that staid spinster had departed.

"How strange that you should think her so ugly," cried Violet. "To me her face is very pleasant. But she thinks herself plain."

"*Diavolo!* What else can she think?"

"But she is such a good creature, Mario; and so sensible, and——"

"Very likely; but I can't waste the short time I have to stay with you in talking of her."

"Must it be so short, Mario?" asked Violet wistfully. "I hoped that you would be able to stay this evening."

"And what would become of to-morrow's paper?"

As a matter of fact, to-morrow's paper was prepared, so far as he had anything to do with preparing it. But there were the evening's lounging and smoking and gossip to be accomplished; seasoned with the delightful sense that they were "business" done in the interests of the journal, and necessary to keep its editor well up to the course of public opinion.

"I hope you are not working too hard, Mario," said Violet innocently. "You look thinner than when we parted."

It was true. He was thinner, and looked older, and had a more sharp and irritable manner. So little gentle, indeed, was his manner, that Violet felt timid of urging on him her desire to tell her uncle of their engagement. But the desire was strong, and those reasons she had to give for it seemed to her so unanswerable, that she nerved herself to speak. She pointed out that to keep the secret now, when they

were all likely to meet frequently, would be impossible without active duplicity, and that both he and she would have to play a part, and to act lies, even if they spoke none. But these representations failed to affect Mario as she had expected. He appeared to look upon them as childish and overstrained, and he said: "Do not, my dear Violetta, give way to what you English call humbug."

Nina Guarini's words recurred to the girl's mind—"Your standard of life is different from his. You would expect what he could not give you, and what he would think you childish for expecting. Your views of many things would be incomprehensible to him, as his would be incomprehensible to you." Violet tried to put these words aside, but they persistently forced themselves on her memory, and she felt unreasonably angry with Nina for having said them, and unreasonably angry with herself for recalling them just then, and altogether confusedly dispirited.

Mario was too much absorbed in his own reflections to pay much heed to her tell-tale face. After a little pause, he asked her if she knew the extent of her uncle's wealth, and whether he were avaricious, like most rich men. And when she told him of the wedding gift of fifty pounds which she had received, besides her travelling expenses, Mario opened his eyes

and ears, and exclaimed, "Fifty pounds? That is more than twelve hundred francs! But he must be a millionnaire, your uncle?"

And then Miss Baines came in; and they agreed that she should introduce Masi to Mr. Higgins as a friend of hers, and they appointed a day for that purpose. And by this time Masi declared that his engagements made it imperatively necessary for him to tear himself away.

CHAPTER II.

IN due course Nina Guarini made her visit to Mrs. Higgins, and in her quiet way she soon formed a pretty correct judgment of that lady. But Nina found her knowledge of English people and English ways by no means sufficient to enable her to interpret Joshua Higgins as glibly as she interpreted his wife.

"You know Rome already, Madame Higgins?" said Nina after the first greetings had been exchanged.

"Oh *dear* yes!" answered Mrs. Higgins, in a tone expressive of the most profound and intimate acquaintance with the Eternal City. (She had been in Rome once for eight days, including an excursion to Naples, with a flock of tourists driven through Europe by contract.)

"And I suppose you will be able to play *cicerone* to your husband."

"No, ma'am, no," interposed Mr. Higgins, with dignity. "My wife don't play anything; and if she

did, I've something else to do than to listen to her. In my country, ma'am, we're busy—occupied. It is different in Italy, I am led to understand. More play than work here, ma'am."

"I hope you don't dislike the Italians, Mr. Higgins," said Nina, with her pretty, subtle smile.

"I can't say I do, ma'am, having seen so very little of them," answered Mr. Higgins, naïvely.

"Ah, that is very just! You shall give me your opinion by-and-by, will you not?"

Mr. Higgins took this demand quite literally, and made answer that he should be happy to impart his opinion to Madame Guarini as soon as he had formed it; and that in point of fact, he had made that long journey partly to gratify his wife's desire to have his opinion of Rome.

"Ah!" exclaimed Nina in a tone of considerable surprise. Then with a sudden light of comprehension in her face, she said, "I see. You are, then, a student of Roman archæology."

"Not at all, ma'am," answered Uncle Joshua, as contemptuously as though she had accused him of devoting his time to Berlin wool work. "Not at all. But Rome is a place that there has been a good deal of talk about, one way or another. It is what may be called a celebrated place, ma'am. Many persons have

cried it up in my presence. But you will understand that that kind of thing doesn't make much impression on a man of my time of life, and with my experience of the world. My wife, for instance, was quite carried away in her descriptions of Rome. The female mind is naturally more easily carried away than ours, owing to a want of ballast, or, since I am talking to a foreigner I may put it more plainly as brains."

"And you might add, Mr. Higgins, by being more sensitive and delicate," put in his wife.

"Very true, Jane Higgins. Sensitiveness and delicacy are appropriate to the female character."

"Our dear Violet, your niece, is very fond of Rome," said Nina. "And Rome is very fond of her,—at least that little bit of Rome which knows her. She is sweet and charming."

"She is, ma'am," assented Uncle Joshua graciously.

"Such a clear, candid nature."

"That, ma'am, runs in my family. The Higginses always hated a lie."

This statement, so far as it concerned himself, was true. Joshua Higgins would have unhesitatingly rejected the most flattering praises if he had thought them to be lies, and would have despised the flatterer. And he would equally have admitted any verdict adverse to his own consummate wisdom, could he have

believed it. But then, knowing himself to be so extremely sagacious, such an excellent man of business, so fair a dealer, so steady a church-goer, so liberal a master, so hospitable a host, so generally judicious, experienced, respectable, and respected, it would have seemed to him mere wrong-headed perversity to doubt the sincerity of persons who affirmed those facts, or to credit with veracity those who denied them.

"And what chiefly interests you in Rome, madame?" asked Nina, mindful of her resolution to ingratiate herself if possible with Violet's new aunt. "Are you most fond of antiquities, or pictures, or churches, or scenery? The English are admirers of scenery."

"Oh, I adore scenery, and pictures, and churches, and catacombs, and I am particularly fond of those coloured worsted-work aprons, something like crewel samplers in the days of my—such as I have seen worked by my mamma, sold by those women in peasant costumes. And statues," added Mrs. Higgins, with a sudden reminiscence of the table of contents in her guide-book.

"Ah, you have a truly catholic taste, madame!"

"Well now, ma'am," broke in Mr. Higgins, "since you have mentioned the word yourself, I will take the opportunity of informing you that I don't approve of the Catholic religion, or rather of the Popish religion,

for *we* believe in the Holy Catholic Church, and there it stands in plain English in our Church Service. I don't wish to make you uncomfortable as a member of the Popish religion, which may be suited to foreigners; although," with a burst of conscientiousness as of one unwilling to lead his hearers astray by a weak indulgence, "I *can't* say that I've noticed it make 'em clean and comfortable in their ways so far as I've gone yet. But I'm bound to tell you that my principles are Church of England staunch to the backbone, and Jane Higgins's are the same."

As to this latter point, by the way, he had never made the slightest inquiry, but had assumed it as confidently as that she washed her face and combed her hair.

"I shall not seek to convert you, Mr. Higgins," said Nina, with a smile. Then, to change the subject, she inquired which of the sights of Rome they had been looking at that day.

"Oh, we have revisited some of my favourite haunts," said Mrs. Higgins. "Entwined with poetic memories, where I was wont to wander in days of yore." Mrs. Higgins, when she bore the name of Lucas, had been "personally conducted" through several of the more famous ruins at a smart pace, and conveyed from point to point, together with eleven others of the flock, in a

vehicle of the kind familiar to English eyes in connection with school feasts, temperance celebrations, drunken returns from the Derby, and other festive occasions.

"The fact is," said Mr. Higgins, reducing his wife's poetic style to the level of prose, "we have been inspecting the Forum, the Coliseum, and the Baths of Carrycallo." And here Mr. Higgins shook his head.

"Were you not pleased?" asked Nina.

"I will not deceive you, ma'am, I *wasn't*. Not to any such an extent as I'd been led to believe."

"Oh, but then the associations, Mr. Higgins!" exclaimed his wife. "The poetic memories entwined, you know, Mr. Higgins! Look at Byron, for instance! What poetical opinions *he* expressed about—a variety of things in Rome!"

"Allow me, if *you* please, Jane Higgins. Madame Gwarinny was not requiring to hear Lord Byron's opinions,—which so far as I am aware were not of a nature to improve the female mind,—but my opinions. —Well now, ma'am, take the Roman Forum. There's something about it very uncomfortable to an English eye. A want of mellowness, a dustiness, a dryness, a general look of bleached bones and a higgledy-piggledyness about the way the retaining fragments of building

stand, which no amount of plans and maps in your guide-book can reconcile the English eye to. Nor yet the English intellect."

"The Coliseum?" suggested Nina.

Mr. Higgins again shook his head, but this time rather in sorrow than in anger. "The Coliseum," ma'am," said he, "has been a handsome pile o' building in its time. But in its present condition it reminds me of a mouldy old Stilton with three parts of the inside scooped out and a bit of the rind cut away."

"I believe that St. Peter's will please you better, Mr. Higgins," said Nina.

"I hope it may, ma'am; I hope it may," he replied. But he evidently was not sanguine on the subject.

Before the Signora Guarini went away, she engaged the Higginses to come and spend an evening at her house. "It is quite without ceremony, you know, Madame Higgins," she said. "You must not expect a grand *soirée*."

"Oh, don't mention it, I'm sure," replied Mrs. Higgins, graciously. "I know that you have very interesting persons at your house. Literary persons. I adore literary persons."

"Humph! I'm afraid a good many of 'em are not very correct in their conduct when you get to know 'em," said Mr. Higgins. "It's an idle kind of life, you

see; and 'Satan finds some mischief still,'—as you are no doubt aware, ma'am."

"Idle!" echoed Nina. "My dear sir, I assure you that a literary life is anything but idle for those who live by literature. I have known a good many writers, and most of them worked very hard."

"Ay, ay, they tell you so, ma'am, being a lady; and the female mind being easy of belief—not that I altogether object to that, when confined *to* the female mind. But you may depend on it, ma'am, that they're mostly a set of idle vagabonds. Writing a book, now! —why, what is it? You just take a quire of paper, a blotting pad, pen, and ink; you set yourself down at your table, and you—and you write your book! Whereas, the seed and corn dealing business, for instance, requires a grasp of mind, a constant attention to the state of the crops and the markets, a knowledge of book-keeping, and a general diligence and activity, that you probably have no idea of. Writing! I'd write half a dozen books easier than I could get through my half-year's business. You just take your quire of paper, your blotting pad, your pen, and your ink; you set yourself down at your table, and—and you write your book."

On the whole, the Signora Guarini had impressed Mr. Higgins favourably. He pronounced her to be

unassuming in her manners, and—so far as he could tell from his brief observation of her—pretty fairly intelligent. Mrs. Joshua Higgins, for her part, had bestowed minute attention on their visitor's attire; and resolved to imitate in her very next new gown the cut of a certain tight-fitting jacket which Nina wore, and which was very becoming to her slender figure.

CHAPTER III.

As Nina Guarini, on leaving the Higginses, was being carried home in her neat, dark green brougham, she ordered the coachman to drive once or twice round the Pincian—that miniature public park with its circumscribed foreground, and almost limitless background; comprising the Eternal City on one hand, and the everlasting hills on the other, and the vast Campagna melting far away into the infinite sea. The whole landscape is steeped in story, saturated with tradition, written over with countless hieroglyphics of the past, from the lovely undulations of its mountain summits, to the uttermost horizon-line of its blue-grey plain. The Pincian Hill was thickly populated. The afternoon was bright and delicious with the scents, and sounds, and sights of Spring. But all that had not attracted the majority of the crowd. The horse-chestnuts were laden with blossoms, the acacias were exquisite in the delicate green of their feathery

branches, the Banksian roses, white and yellow, were tumbling over the walls like perfumed flower-cascades in the Sleeping Beauty's garden, arrested in their course until the coming of the Prince should set them free to flow again. But neither leaf nor flower, nor the fresh grass, nor the twittering birds, had anything to do with attracting the human beings who thronged the Pincian. Princes there were, and Princesses, but they did not look at all as if they belonged to a fairy story. Such spells as they dealt in were performed by the *Curato;* and if they had any faith in magic potions, they bought them at the perfumer's shop, in the guise of cosmetics. No, the majority of the crowd on the Pincian that day, like the majority of crowds all over the world, were there because they knew other people would be there.

It was a *festa,* and the band played, and equipages of all kinds were drawn up on the wide gravelled terrace, and pedestrians of all grades strolled about and stared at each other. The Italians are practically the most democratic, as they are the most courteous, of European nations. They have, generally speaking, absolutely none of that left-handed worship of titles and finery which has been known occasionally to manifest itself elsewhere in a violent outcry against them, as being truly so very important that free and

equal and fraternal citizens cannot on any account afford to let them alone. The Italian—and especially the Roman—of the poorer classes, habitually assumes that his dignity as a human being is able to take care of itself even against such tremendous odds as a very big painted coat of arms, or a cocked hat with gold lace on it. No doubt much of this simplicity of spirit will disappear with increasing wealth, and by contact with cosmopolitan vulgarity of the expensive kind, which has to be accepted as a *per contra* to set against many good things achieved by Italy in these latter years. Already, indeed, there are symptoms of a change in this respect. But for the present it may be broadly stated that the social accomplishment of "giving one's self airs" languishes in Italy for want of a public opinion to foster it.

So the crowd of pedestrians on the Pincian, and the families crammed five or six together into street cabs, were quite as much at their ease as were the folks in smart carriages, whom they looked at ungrudgingly, and considered to form part of the show which they had a right to expect on a *festa*. Standing at the doors of many carriages were men young and old, singly and in groups, talking to the ladies within. The carriage of the Marchesa del Ciuffo had a small group of men round it. But the smart low phaeton of Madame

Xavier was surrounded by a little court of admirers four and five deep, and its fair occupant's clean washed countenance competed successfully with the pigments of the Marchesa. To be sure Madame Xavier had the advantage of comparative youth. The Del Ciuffo was handicapped with a weight of at least half-a-dozen years more than her rival. And when a woman turns thirty every year tells heavily. But the Del Ciuffo was a far handsomer woman than the other, with well-cut features and fine dark eyes; whereas Madame Xavier's outline was irregular, and her light eyes of no colour in particular. But her great attraction consisted in the gay audacity of her speech and manner. She had naturally high spirits, and rattled on with easy joviality, caring little what she laughed at, so that she might but laugh. It was generally understood in the brilliant circles which she adorned, that "you might say anything to Madame Xavier," provided it had the excuse of a joke in it. And this made her very popular, as enabling most men to shine conversationally in her presence; since if wit be not common, coarseness is not rare. And it can, moreover, be acquired by a judicious attention to the best models;—which is not the case with wit. Thus a competition with Madame Xavier for masculine attention was no light matter, as the Marchesa del Ciuffo had found to her chagrin.

The Marchesa's style was languishing and melancholy. She leaned back in her carriage, seeming to find it a severe effort to raise her eyes, or open her lips. But as Nina's brougham rolled smoothly past her, her eyes acquired a spark of vitality, and she turned her head with a sudden movement. Presently Nina approached the barouche of the Princess Carlovingi, with its powdered and silk-stockinged footmen, showy liveries, splendid horses, costly trappings, an immense coat of arms painted on the panels, and the Princess and two of her daughters sitting inside it in gorgeous array. Nina's sight was as keen as a hawk's, and she saw the Princess bend down as the brougham drew near, and say a word to a flaxen-headed young man who stood leaning his folded arms on her carriage door, and whom Nina recognized as Ciccio Nasoni. Similarly Madame Xavier honoured her with a broad stare; and the old Princess Nasoni, perched up in the family coach, knitted her brows and gazed at the dark green brougham with a meditative look.

These, and other symptoms observed by the Signora Guarini, confirmed the knowledge she had already acquired in other ways, that the Pontine Marshes Company, and she herself as being supposed to be connected with the rulers of it, were attracting a great deal of public attention. One singular point was that every

one assumed Beppe Guarini to be the chief personage in the Company. There seems to be an ineradicable instinct in human nature to set up some one individual as a kind of shorthand sign, or symbolic epitome of certain subjects. Thus as in London at one time all stories of practical jokes were fathered on Theodore Hook, so in Rome the name of Beppe Guarini was equivalent to an "abstract and brief chronicle" of all money speculations: and every share list, from railways and municipal loans to the latest scheme for extending the blessings of the tramway to the top of Soracte, was supposed to emanate from the brain, and to enrich the pocket, of Beppe Guarini. These ready-made conclusions save the trouble of thinking, or investigating facts. And by dint of being constantly accepted, or at least allowed to pass unchallenged, they acquire the authority of dogmas. "Oh, but everybody knows," is the inevitable corollary to "Oh, but everybody says." And when the proceeding is reversed, and "everybody's" knowledge precedes "everybody's" affirmation instead of following it, the world will have made an important progress—and a great many revolutions on its axis!

On the afternoon of that same day when Nina Guarini had been the cynosure of very unneighbourly eyes on the Pincian, Don Francesco Nasoni, Duca di Pontalto, paid a visit to his grandmother. That

exemplary lady had been much hurt by his defection from the good cause, but she had been careful not to break with him formally, having arrived (although by a different road) at the same conclusion with which Nina had comforted Prince Massimo: "He will come back to the fold. You will see he will come back to the fold." Nor had Don Francesco, familiarly known as Ciccio, ever ceased to visit the Princess from time to time. We have seen that even during the high tide of his democratic aspirations he felt bound to present himself at a *soirée* in Palazzo Carlovingi in obedience to his grandmother's behest. And, perhaps, the period was now at hand which Mario Masi had prophesied, when Ciccio would marry, and have his children educated by the Jesuits. At any rate he trod the dim and chilly corridor that led to his grandmother's apartment with an accustomed foot, and presented himself before the Princess with his usual lack-lustre imperturbability.

The old woman's private sanctum was much more like the office of an impoverished notary than the sitting-room of a noble Roman matron. It was lofty, as were all the rooms of that suite; and had a vaulted ceiling painted with some dismal allegory in time-darkened *fresco* whose hovering developments of muscular Paganism were happily too far aloft to impress themselves vividly on the spectator. Its flooring was of unglazed

bricks, imparting an Arctic chill to the lower extremities in winter, and in summer affording good cover to innumerable hordes of fleas, that must have lived not only in the dust, but on the dust, for they had little other sustenance. It was now, however, the middle season, when wintry frosts were past and gone, and the lively population in the crevices between the bricks had not entered into full summer activity. The walls were stencilled in a dark blue pattern on a raw blue ground. (They had doubtless been hidden by rich hangings once upon a time.) In one wall the space not taken up by the entrance door was entirely filled by a coarsely-varnished deal press containing papers. Another wall was broken by a window looking into the gravelled court-yard, and darkened by the shadow of the mediæval Tor Nasoni; and underneath this window was a miserably small iron stove poking its shabby snout of a chimney out through the lower pane, where a tin plate had been substituted for glass. In the third wall rose the imposing doorway with marble jambs and lintel, and the Nasoni arms in stucco above it, which led into the Princess's bedchamber. And against the fourth wall stood a long sofa covered with faded yellow damask—a spindle-shanked, narrow-seated, inhospitable sofa, as ever was produced by an artificer of the first Napoleonic Empire.

But above it hung an object which was in singular contrast with the atmosphere of mental and bodily starvation pervading everything else—a magnificent picture of the Venetian school, perhaps an original, perhaps a copy, in any case a superb work of art—representing the Madonna with the Divine Infant on her knee, behind her a lovely landscape, and at her feet two exquisite child angels singing and playing instruments. The effect of the glowing colour, the sweetness, warmth, and beauty of this painting seen in the midst of the surrounding desert of stencilled wall and brick floor, and beneath that lowering canopy of anatomical distortions, was like looking from the loophole of a dungeon into God's sunlighted world. In front of the sofa was spread a narrow strip of common carpet. In the centre of the room stood a square table covered with a green baize cloth, on which were ranged in order several piles of yellow papers, a huge pewter inkstand, a pounce-box, three quill pens, a book of devotions, a photograph of Pope Pius the Ninth in a cheap gilt frame, and an antique crucifix in silver and ivory of fine workmanship. Near the table was an armchair of the same yellow damask as the sofa, and close to it a straw hassock for the feet.

Here sat Donna Teresa Filomena Maria Giuseppina, Princess Nasoni. A meagre old woman, with a skin like the parchment of a drum, handsome features, and

dark eyes which were still brilliant under habitually frowning eyebrows. She wore a jet black wig, which in some degree vulgarized her physiognomy that would otherwise have been strikingly picturesque. And over the black wig was tied a kerchief of black lace meeting under the chin. Her dress was also black, and plain even to sordidness. When her grandson entered, she was casting up a row of figures in a little paper-covered account-book; and as she looked up at him over her spectacles she kept her finger on the point she had reached in the column, and motioned him with the other hand to wait until she should have finished adding up the sum. Having done so, she took off her glasses, and held out her lean and wrinkled hand, half covered by a black silk mitten. Don Francesco took it, and formally touched it with his lips.

"What do you want, Ciccio?" asked the old woman in a deep, strong voice, strangely at variance with the fragility of her appearance.

"I came to speak to you about the Pontine Marshes property," said Ciccio. "I think it is time to take some steps about selling."

The Princess evidently knew all about it. She reflected for an instant, and then said, "Do you know precisely how much of the property these people would want to buy? Have you seen any maps or plans?"

"No, I don't know precisely. But Don Silvestro knows. He says it lies between Lestra di Campolungo and Mattoccia."

"And Pietro? What does he think about it?"

Pietro was the Prince Carlovingi whom Donna Teresa had known from childhood, and whom she never called by any other name.

"He thinks I had better sell the land now."

"Humph! Is that all?"

"Oh well, the Prince hasn't done badly."

"Has he bought any shares?"

Ciccio shook his head emphatically.

"Then what has he done?"

"Directly he dropped a word about the Company here and there it had a good effect. If people think he is interested in it, that will do as well for us as if he had bought."

"But if none of our people have shares, all this crying up of the Company will only benefit the Revolutionists," observed the Princess, watching her grandson very keenly.

"I've got to sell my land," returned Ciccio in his slow guttural tones. "The more they prosper the better terms they can afford to give. In fact, things have gone so far now that Don Silvestro says he thinks they *must* take the land at any price."

"And when that is done——?"

Ciccio made no further answer than an expressive shrug.

"Humph!" grunted the Princess. "It seems a pity, too! Would it not be possible to get the thing into good hands, and keep the Revolutionists out of it altogether?"

"Out of the question. You must have Government support, and you wouldn't get it."

"Ah, *Santa Madonna!* How can you have anything to say to such wretches! Atheists, incendiaries, robbers, traitors——"

"Oh, I'm a Liberal in politics, you know," answered Ciccio with a sort of dogged calm.

The old Princess made an impatient movement with her hands, which she then clasped forcibly together, and bending her frowning brows on her grandson, said gloomily, "I will have another *novena* said for you, Ciccio."

"I think," pursued the young man quite unmoved, "that I had better see Guarini. He's the leading person in the matter." For the Duke of Pontalto shared the common persuasion that no association for financial purposes could exist in Rome without Beppe Guarini's forming part of it.

"That's the man with a handsome wife," said the Princess. "I saw her to-day."

"She's not handsome. Too thin. But she's clever," replied Ciccio.

At this moment a servant entered and communicated that his Excellency the Prince Nasoni desired to know if the Princess would be pleased to receive him. The grandmother and grandson looked at each other doubtfully, but when the servant added, "His Excellency is at the door," the Princess said in a loud voice, "Tell my son that I shall be very glad to see him." And almost immediately the Prince entered. He was dressed with his usual taste and care, and looked a strikingly handsome and elegant man; not the less so by contrast with his son, whose appearance and demeanour were neither handsome nor elegant. The Prince advanced to his mother, and kissed her hand with a graceful deference; very different from Ciccio's formal salute. Then turning to the young man with an air of cool condescension, he extended to him the tips of his well-gloved fingers, and slightly saying, "How does the Duke of Pontalto?" seated himself in the chair from which his son had arisen when he entered.

"And how are you, my dear mother?" he said after a short silence.

"I am not very well in body, Massimo; but that is to be looked for at my age. And I am a good deal troubled in mind. Who can be otherwise in the times we live in?"

"I was in hopes that there were symptoms of some-

thing good being about to happen, even in these times; at least for our family. I thought to find you alone, and"——

"Shall I go away?" asked Ciccio, who had remained standing.

"That is not necessary," answered his father carelessly. "Unless, that is to say, your grandmother desires to get rid of you;" and here the Prince bowed to her.

"Sit down, Ciccio," said the old Princess, as though she had been speaking to a child. And Ciccio obeyed, with a more than usually sullen stare in his pale eyes.

"What were you saying, my son, about better times being in store for our family?" asked the Princess.

"My dear mother, I know nothing. But I have heard a rumour of an alliance in prospect between the Duke of Pontalto and Donna Ermengarda Carlovingi. And I should suppose that would be considered an auspicious event."

The Princess looked slightly disturbed, and answered quickly, "Nothing is settled, Massimo. Of course nothing could be settled without consulting you."

"Oh, why not? You are old-fashioned, my dear mother. The Duke of Pontalto, who I believe has an extended acquaintance among them, will tell you that the gentry who at present hold sway here look upon

filial obedience and respect as an obsolete prejudice. How, indeed, can any father in Rome expect to be treated with due observance when the Father and Sovereign of us all is despoiled, and a prisoner in his own city!" And here the Prince took out his cambric handkerchief, and filled the room with a waft of delicate perfume.

Ciccio considered it to be too bad that this elderly spendthrift, who had wasted the property which ought to have descended to his heirs, and had filled the city with scandalous stories of his extravagance and dissipation, should expect as much deference as though he had been a model father, with a talent for economy in the interests of his son, and no bill at his tailor's. And the young man's brow grew so lowering that the Princess made him a sign to go away. "You need not stay, Ciccio," said she. "I want to talk to your father." And when her grandson silently departed with a cold bow, she laid her hand on Massimo's arm, and said in a confidential tone, "My son, let us be careful how we handle this matter. A breath may overthrow all my labours; and I have slaved to bring it about, for such a marriage would be the saving of Ciccio."

"Really!" said the Prince, who still preserved an injured air of *hauteur*, and to say truth didn't exhibit any absorbing interest in the saving of Ciccio. "I

should have thought he might have found a Duchess of Pontalto who didn't squint!"

"Of course there would be no difficulty in finding a wife for him. But suppose he had taken it into his head to ally himself with some of those people of the Revolution! Listen. This is how the case stands." And then the Princess proceeded briefly to tell her son, how that by various means at her disposal she had ascertained that the Carlovingis were desirous of seeing Ermengarda married; and how she had further ascertained that they would not object to her becoming Duchess of Pontalto; and how the idea having been very dexterously presented to Ciccio, that young gentleman had not shown himself averse to it. But the Princess went on to say that matters had by no means been brought to a definite conclusion as yet, Ciccio being a somewhat difficult fish to play, and very fully conscious of his value in the matrimonial market. Pietro Carlovingi, however, had displayed a very friendly interest in Ciccio's affairs, even to the point of advising him as to the disposal of some of his property.

Prince Massimo Nasoni pricked up his ears at this, and wished to hear all about it. And when his mother proceeded to tell him that Ciccio would certainly be able to realize a large sum by selling to a certain company a large tract of land which was almost value-

less as it stood, the Prince's countenance expressed by turns a variety of conflicting emotions; amongst which amused satisfaction undoubtedly predominated. "Ha!" said he. "Then it is a portion of the San Gemignano property which Ciccio proposes to sell?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember the terms of my marriage contract, mother?" asked the Prince, stroking his moustache.

"Not accurately. Your father and old San Gemignano arranged it chiefly."

"But old San Gemignano got hold of me at the last moment, and persuaded me to consent to a clause that was very much in their favour. You don't remember that, mother?"

"I remember something of it. However, it don't much matter; since Ciccio is his mother's heir, all the property comes to our family in one way or another. But what makes you speak of it now?"

"I suppose the talk of this marriage put it into my head. Ah, Ciccio is sure to make a good bargain when his turn comes. I am told he has great business talents. Only one thing surprises me a little; that Pietro Carlovingi should have no objection to so very —enlightened and Liberal a son-in-law."

"We must have faith, Massimo, that the boy will see

his errors and return to the right way. And, after all, we must remember it might have been worse."

"Might it? Well, I suppose he *might* have taken to robbing on the highway. But, really I think things are bad enough. His chosen associates are avowed socialists and republicans!"

"Yes; but, Massimo," and here the old Princess laid her hand emphatically on her son's arm, "Ciccio has never gone to the Quirinal."

CHAPTER IV.

ALTHOUGH the course of the *Tribune of the People* was not running smooth, Masi was still a newspaper editor and a political writer, and a possible subject for the carrying out of various schemes; and he had his parasites. He was not without friends either, as we know. But the friends for the most part lacked one indispensable qualification for making their society agreeable; they did not believe in the *Tribune of the People.* Now the parasites believed in it to a man. To hear them one might have thought not only that Rome thrilled responsive to the leading articles of that journal, but that the public opinion of Europe was swayed by it as tides beneath the moon. They had inexhaustible stories of the startling effects produced by the *Tribune* on this or that exalted personage. The Pope was confidently stated to peruse it eagerly from end to end every morning before breaking his fast. (Which considering the tone he was habitually alluded

to in it, argued either a very stoic strain of philosophy, or a surprising thirst for information on the part of His Holiness.) As to the august inhabitants of the Quirinal, it was indubitable—according to the parasites—that His Majesty King Humbert and all his Ministers exhibited the liveliest satisfaction at every severe hit of the *Tribune* against the Opposition; and that, however appearances might be to the contrary, the Sovereign of Italy entirely concurred in the *Tribune's* democratic sentiments, and had been known to quote them to the confusion of Deputies X., Y., and Z., who were Conservatives of the most prejudiced and pig-tailed type. This was gratifying, but it did not sell the paper.

But amongst all the backers, partisans, and hangers-on, there were several who were full of magnificent schemes for making the fortune of the *Tribune* and every one connected with it. Their favourite conjuring word was "a combination." No Arabian *Sesame* ever opened the door to greater wonders than the "combination" was to reveal to the editor of the *Tribune* if once it could be effected. If the ex-Minister Sfogo could only be got to come into the combination, and the ex-Minister Nogo could only be kept out of it, all would be well. Again, if the party of the Honourable Deputy for Camiciarossa could be induced to make a "combination" with the party of the Honourable

Deputy for Cartabianca, and if both parties would subscribe a handsome sum for the support of the *Tribune* (which would be an extremely advantageous speculation for them if they could be brought to see it from the right point of view), brilliant results would immediately follow. Or once more, if certain of their Excellencies who at present held portfolios would make a "combination" to devote a portion of the funds at their disposal to subsidizing the *Tribune* and furnishing it with the latest and most authentic intelligence from their respective departments, the Government would obtain a fulcrum on which to rest a lever of enormous power.

But there was one man who privately besieged Masi with schemes of a less political and more personal kind. This was a somewhat remarkable personage. His name was—or he said it was—Smith-Müller. He called himself a Servian subject, but of mixed English and German extraction; and his visiting card bore this inscription in the French language: "Alexis Smith-Müller. *Colonel en retraite.* Bela Palanka, Serbie." He was a stout tall man, speaking several European languages with great fluency. He had a red bloated face, dark twinkling eyes with a look of restless cunning in them, grizzled hair closely cropped in military fashion, and heavy moustaches, which were chameleon-

like in their changes of hue, from deep black to a rusty grey, according as he took heed to renew their dye at the due season, or neglected to do so:—the latter state of things being the most frequent. If there was one characteristic which distinguished Colonel Smith-Müller's manner more than another, it was frankness. He was frank to the verge of *brusquerie*,—and beyond it. He had lived in many countries, and professed himself a Citizen of the World. He had also, he said, seen a considerable amount of military service, chiefly in the Eastern parts of Europe; and he was a strong partisan of Liberal institutions.

Masi had met Colonel Smith-Müller at a *café* which he was in the habit of frequenting. The Colonel was very often there in the company of an Englishman. The two, it appeared, had travelled from Brindisi together: the Englishman being on his way home from India, and the Servian just arrived from Greece, where he had been, as he informed Masi, on private business connected with the inheritance of a deceased sister. For it was part of the Colonel's habitual frankness to volunteer a great many details about his family and connections, which appeared to be of a truly cosmopolitan character; and to explain his goings and comings as though he were not perfectly at liberty to visit any part of the world he pleased without

giving an account of his movements. Perhaps it was the inevitable result of this confiding candour in himself that the Colonel was very inquisitive about other people's affairs. He would ask point-blank questions with an innocent air as though he were doing the most natural thing in the world. But it was noticeable that if he did not bring down his answer at the first shot, so to speak, he never pressed an inquiry indiscreetly, but accepted a hint to desist from it with the utmost good-humour. Since, however, his English fellow-traveller had no motive for concealing his name and business, Colonel Smith-Müller soon learned that he was called William Chester, that he was a civil engineer by profession, that he had a good berth in British India, and that he was going to England for a short holiday after an absence of seven years. This Mr. William Chester was a young man of about thirty, with a powerful, heavily-built frame, a pleasant sunburnt face, and mild, honest grey eyes. His voice and manner had a peculiar gentle quietude, and his movements, generally rather slow, were curiously expressive of latent strength. Masi first spoke to him when Chester was in some difficulty at the *café* for want of an Italian word; and after that they always greeted each other in a friendly manner. But the acquaintance stopped there.

Colonel Smith-Müller, on the contrary, soon improved his acquaintance with the editor of the *Tribune* to the point of frequenting his office constantly, and offering him a variety of suggestions for making money, as has been said. Such was the fertility of the Colonel's genius, that he offered to allow Mr. William Chester to share in some of his schemes. But that dull Briton failed to profit by these generous offers. One favourite idea of the Colonel's was to buy forage for cavalry cheap in Italy, and sell it dear in England to the authorities at the Horse Guards. Thousands of pounds were to be made by the transaction; he only wanted some means of getting at the proper persons in London. Chester had been in India. Surely he must know some military man who knew other military men, and so on step by step until they came to the right one. He should have his percentage on the sale; being required merely (since the Colonel happened for the moment to be out of funds) to advance a sum as earnest-money to the Italian growers of hay. And, even putting the percentage at a modest figure, he could not fail to pocket a handsome profit. When that failed, the Colonel inquired if Mr. Chester had not some acquaintances among the members of the Indian Government, as he (Colonel Smith-Müller) had, by an extraordinary and romantic train of circumstances,

come into the possession of documents revealing certain Russian intrigues in the East, for which documents the British authorities would undoubtedly be willing to pay a large price, could he but get a hearing from them. When that failed, he asked in a careless and casual manner whether Chester would put his hand to a bill for a particular friend of his (the Colonel's), a nobleman of princely rank, who was travelling *incognito* and chanced to find himself short of money in one of the first hotels in Rome. When that failed, he burst into a jovial laugh, slapped Chester on the back, declared he was the most original and delightful fellow he had met for many a day, and borrowed five francs to pay a cab fare, finding to his great surprise that he had forgotten to put his purse in his pocket.

But in Mario Masi he found a listener more favourably inclined to profit by his talents. Although a stranger in Rome, the Colonel was well acquainted with Italy. He had visited that country at various interesting epochs in her history, and had been intimate with several of her leading statesmen and patriots, who were, unfortunately, now dead, or they might have been appealed to for confirmation. He had been a bosom friend of Mazzini and a confidant of Count Cavour; and possessed, he said, curious information about the secret correspondence of every European

Cabinet with the Italian Government, from the year 1859 downwards. However that might be, it was certain that he soon made himself familiar with the current gossip of Rome, spoken and printed, and he was diligent in reporting it to Mario Masi. It has been said that the Colonel was remarkably frank; and, indeed, he always said so himself. He bestowed an immense deal of frankness on Masi. One of his frankest complaints against Masi was that the latter did not understand how to make the most of his position.

"*Que diable!*" the polyglot Colonel would explain. "You have the ball at your foot. You ought to be a millionnaire—a billionnaire! Look at the fellows riding in their coaches who haven't brains enough to be your errand boys! *La carrière ouverte aux talents!* I'm no worshipper of Napoleon—too great a Liberal—hate the whole breed of them! But there, he had reason on his side. *La carrière ouverte aux talents!* That's a democratic sentiment, *mon Capitaine.*"

With all his liberality, however, Colonel Smith-Müller had one or two strong prejudices. He disliked and mistrusted Beppe Guarini to an extraordinary degree. He did not know him personally, not at all —had never set eyes on him in his life. But his judgment of Guarini, founded on circumstantial evi-

dence, was profoundly unfavourable, and he constantly warned Masi against putting any trust in him. The Colonel had scraped acquaintance with Gino Peretti, and he found Gino prepared to agree with him to some extent on this point. To be sure, Peretti did not abuse his friend unreservedly. But he acknowledged—with that reluctance with which a friend's shortcomings must ever be acknowledged—that Beppe Guarini had one or two weaknesses. The chiefest of them was, perhaps, a blind belief in his wife's talents. For his part, he (Gino Peretti) never knew any good come of letting women meddle in matters beyond their tether, which should be strictly limited to domestic and household affairs. If the husband happened to be in the oil trade, the tether might, of course, be extended to a knowledge of the cultivation of olive-trees, and the best and most economical methods of pressing their berries, together with a keen intelligence as to the favourable moment for selling or holding. But these were unimportant variations in a great theory, and every man could make them to suit his own particular case. And here Colonel Smith-Müller went far beyond Peretti. In fact, he became so vituperative that Masi stopped him with a sharp word or two, bidding him remember that the Signora Guarini was his friend, and that he had the highest admiration and respect for her.

The Colonel drew back at once, excused himself for any unduly strong expressions he might have used by the fact (undoubted in itself) of his having had a glass or two more than was good for him, and embraced with effusion his "noble and chivalrous friend," a proceeding which would have been pleasanter if the Colonel's consumption of cognac had been more parsimonious, and his consumption of soap less so.

Masi offered to introduce him at Casa Guarini. "You'll repent all your blasphemies against La Nina if once you see her and talk with her," said Masi. "Come, I'm going there to-night. Let me take you. You will meet men there whom you would like to know."

But the Colonel excused himself. He was a rough soldier, unused for many years to society, although there had been a time when the most brilliant saloons in Europe had been open to him. But all that was past and gone. And no arguments would induce him to set foot in the Guarinis' house, nor even to meet Beppe elsewhere. "Forgive me, my dear, noble young friend," said the Colonel, "but there are certain stern principles I have never paltered with. That may be the reason that you see me a poor man to-day, or it may not. No matter. I have made it a rule through life never to give my hand in friendship to a man I cannot respect."

CHAPTER V.

In considering the prospects of her young friend, Nina Guarini sometimes had sanguine moments, in which she persuaded herself that Mr. Higgins might be induced to bestow such a dowry on his niece as would place her above want in the event (which Nina foresaw) of Masi's losing the whole of his slender patrimony. Violet was not extravagant nor ambitious, and one could still live on very modest means in Italy. Masi even might obtain some employment sufficient to satisfy his self-respect that he was not dependent on his wife's money. Then, again, her spirits would sink, and she would be able to see no escape for him from the tangle of responsibilities in which he had involved himself. "Ah, if he had not resigned his commission!" said Nina to herself. "Soldiering is the trade he knows. And, perhaps, of all trades it is the one best suited to him; for in the army orders must be obeyed, and there is no opportunity for dawdling between two courses

and then choosing the wrong one in a hurry, as he is almost certain to do when left to himself."

From her husband Nina learned that Gino Peretti had resolved to withdraw all money support from the paper, and had advised Masi to give it up, but that Masi persisted in endeavouring to carry it on. And Guarini declared he had no idea how the *Tribune* subsisted, and got published from day to day. He might have made a shrewd guess, and he might even have known with some certainty all the shifts and expedients, the risings and fallings of the financial thermometer, which attended the issue of that unprosperous print, had he thought it worth while to investigate them. But he did not think it worth while. Mario Masi was a profoundly uninteresting personage to him. Guarini was what is called an easy-going sort of man. He had not much rancour in him, and in any case he never allowed private resentments to interfere with business. But so far as he had any active feeling at all towards Masi he rather disliked him, thinking his manner conceited, and somewhat pretentious. Moreover, Beppe thought that his wife wasted more sympathy and interest than were needful on the ex-Captain. It must be understood that Beppe was not jealous in the ordinary sense of the word, but he felt irritated at seeing "so much fuss made about Masi," as he phrased

it to himself, just as he might have been irritated at seeing his wife spoil a child or pamper a lap-dog. As to its all being done for the sake of the little English girl, that was very well, and Beppe believed it. But he was not at all sure that Masi did not set down somewhat of the Signora Nina's kindness to the score of his own personal merits and attractions. Beppe would have liked to assure him in the clearest manner that the Signora Nina cared not one straw for him or his *beau yeux*, or his military swagger, that was all. But he was not jealous—not the least in the world.

Things had already gone so badly with the *Tribune* that Masi had tasted the bitterness of being rudely dunned for money which he was unable to pay. He had attempted, urged by necessity, to gain the support of certain political leaders of his party. Such arrangements were not unheard of. But it was late to make the effort. The *Tribune* was not successful enough to be tempting. However, his overtures had been received in one or two quarters. In the midst of this came the sudden rise of the Pontine Marshes shares, and a corresponding rise in Masi's hopes and spirits. He was believed to be a larger holder than was the fact, and the *Tribune*, which had always upheld the company, was credited with a great deal of its advance in public estimation. The political personages appeared

likely to make up Masi's negotiations seriously, and creditors began to bend their backs and unbend their brows with a lively sense of benefits to come.

It was during this gleam of sunshine that Masi first made the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Higgins. Miss Baines, it may be remembered, had made an appointment to introduce him to Uncle Joshua. But before that could come off they met in the house of Nina Guarini. There was a large gathering. Mario arrived late, as was his custom. Nina descried him almost immediately on his arrival, and beckoning him out of the tea-room, led him round by another way into the study, which was empty. "The Higginses are here," she said. "Poor little Violet has been so nervous and anxious all the evening. She asked me, almost as soon as she arrived, if you were coming, and I was obliged to answer that I thought it doubtful, as you had not honoured us very often of late. Oh, yes, I know; 'business of the *Tribune*,'—'Affairs of the nation?' Why, you look quite bright—like your old self! *Tant mieux!* What has happened? Pontine shares going up? Ah, sell, *caro mio!* Sell to-morrow—to-night, if you can."

Involuntarily Masi recalled some of Colonel Smith-Müller's insinuations. Was it so clear, he had asked, that the Signora Guarini was always disinterested in

her advice? And even if the lady's motives were excellent, might she not be a tool in the hands of her husband? Might not he desire to injure a rival journalist and a rising man? Masi was half ashamed of himself for thinking of these words, but he did think of them. He was relieved when Nina, giving him a little push on the shoulder, said "*Basta!* No more business for to-night. Go and captivate the old Higgins, and make Violet's pretty eyes brighten at the sight of your good-for-nothing visage," and so dismissed him.

Making his way into the drawing-room, the first person whom he saw was Miss Baines. Her uncle and his wife were yonder, sitting at the end of the room, she told him. She would introduce him to them immediately. And Violet was there also, but had just gone into the tea-room with her cousin. Oh, had not Captain Masi heard? It was quite a curious story. Fancy Violet's cousin—or, at any rate, second cousin—having chanced to go to the very same boarding-house where Mr. and Mrs. Higgins were staying, and having made their acquaintance before he found out that they were relations of his own! That was Mrs. Higgins, in the lilac satin gown. But he had better be introduced to Uncle Joshua first. Would Captain Masi come now? Miss Baines was nervous and fluttered, and walked off

hurriedly towards the end of the room, giving Masi no time for further questioning.

They advanced to where Mr. Higgins sat in a large arm-chair, haranguing old Giorgi (specially told off by Nina for the service), and abating no whit of his habitual self-assertion in the midst of a scene so new to him. There could be no better proof of the sincerity of Uncle Joshua's good opinion of himself than his demeanour under these circumstances. The least consciousness of humbug—or even a grain of self-distrust —would have weakened him. But his conscience was clear of any attempt to appear what he was not. To appear what he was sufficed to Uncle Joshua; and must also, in his judgment, suffice to impress all beholders with respect.

"This is my friend, Captain Masi, Uncle Joshua, whom I've spoken to you about," said Betsy Baines, with even more than her usual timidity in addressing her uncle.

"How do you do, sir?" said Mr. Higgins, holding out his hand. "Why, Lor' bless me, sir; you're quite a young man."

"Alas, not very young!" answered Masi with his winning smile.

"Yes, yes, you are. Quite a young man. My niece, Miss Baines here, said you were retired from the army.

And I expected to see an elderly gentleman past active service."

"I didn't intend—" stammered Miss Baines nervously. "I'm very sorry——"

"Nothing to be sorry about, Betsy. I dare say Captain Marsy don't feel it much of a misfortune not to be an old gentleman with grey hair. I suppose you didn't like a military life, sir?"

"I wanted to improve my fortunes, Mr. Higgins, and the army is not a good road for making money."

"Well, I suppose not. And what business have you taken up since you left the army?"

"I am at present engaged in editing a newspaper—"

"Wheugh! Editing a newspaper! Well now, I shouldn't have thought that was a good road for making money any more than the army,—at least not in these parts."

"Oh, but I have other methods,—commercial speculation. I have a great respect for commerce, Mr. Higgins,—like the English nation. The English are a great commercial people," said Masi, thinking he was paying an irresistible compliment.

"The English nation, sir," answered Mr. Higgins, "can do pretty well whatever they've a mind to. But it don't follow that every one can imitate 'em. However, I hope you'll succeed with your speculations, I'm sure."

"May I have the honour to be presented to Mrs. Higgins?" asked Masi, a little thrown out by this unexpected reply.

"You may, certainly: and Mrs. Higgins will be happy to make your acquaintance. I'll introduce you to her directly. There she sits. You see that young gentleman she's talking to? He's a Dook they tell me."

"Yes. I know him."

"Do you? And he *is* a Dook, is he? Well now, tell me; is he always as low in his spirits as he seems to be this evening?"

"He appears to me to be much as usual."

"Does he? Then I'll tell you what I should recommend for him; a good nourishing plain diet, exercise in the open air, and sea-bathing. There must be a sad want of stamina for a young fellow to look and move like that at his age. But, for that matter, I don't know what the constitutions of the present day are made of. Look at me! Over seventy years old, sir; and not in bed with a day's illness for more than a quarter of a century."

The thought darted into Masi's mind that waiting for an inheritance from this old gentleman might be an intolerably tedious business, and that he had far better give Violet whatever he meant her to have,

at once, and have done with it. Then Mr. Higgins rose up from his chair, and, going up to his wife, said, "This gentleman is Captain Marsy, a friend of my niece, Miss Baines. My wife, Mrs. Joshua Higgins."

That lady was in a high state of elation, and had been playing off her finest airs of elegance for the Duke of Pontalto's benefit, to such an extent that Ciccio sat staring at her, for the most part in silence, not in the least degree comprehending the bearing of half her speeches, and thinking her the most bewildering person he had ever met with in all his life. But unconscious of his state of mind regarding her, Mrs. Higgins talked on, rolling her eyes, shrugging her buxom shoulders, fanning herself, languishing, smiling, bridling, and, above all, talking, talking, talking, until the diamond drops in her ears (a wedding gift from Mr. Higgins) quivered again with her eloquence. She had been prepared beforehand to give any friend of Miss Baines's a very condescending and cool reception. But she changed her mind a little on seeing Masi, and she changed it a great deal on observing that the Duke of Pontalto saluted Captain Masi very civilly, and Captain Masi saluted the Duke of Pontalto very distantly. "Oh, you are already acquainted with his Grace!" she said with a girlish giggle. "I was going to present you." But "his Grace," after one long last

stare, which apparently failed to give him any distinct enlightenment as to what sort of queer creature this was whom *la Nina* had got hold of, relapsed into apathetic melancholy, gave a somnolent bow, and slowly shambled away.

"Delightful person!" exclaimed Mrs. Higgins to Masi, as the Duke of Pontalto turned his back. "Have you known him long?"

"Who—Ciccio Nasoni? Oh yes. That is to say one sees him about, you know."

"Ah, true, of course. In the *monde*, naturally. I suppose you go a good deal into the *monde?*"

Masi said "Yes," at a venture, and looked about impatiently for Violet. He was curious to see the cousin; and, in some dim unacknowledged way, a little resentful at the existence of a cousin of whom he had never heard.

"What do you mean by the *mongd*, Jane Higgins?" asked her spouse, gravely.

"The *beau monde* of course, my dear. The fashionable world," she answered with a playful tap of her fan.

"Oh! I am not acquainted with foreign languages, myself, Captain Marsy, having been occupied with more important business all my life. But my wife, Mrs. Joshua Higgins, she is up to any amount of *parly-voo.*"

"Flatterer!" exclaimed Mrs. Joshua Higgins, with another playful poke of her fan, and a giggle. "Don't believe him, Captain Masi! But about the Duke—you called him by his Christian name, did you not?"

"Oh, most people do that. He's a sort of character like Stenterello. I suppose you know Stenterello?"

"Well I—n—no; I almost fancy not; but, having travelled a good deal, you see, my acquaintance is so large that I—I hardly know," answered Mrs. Higgins, in some confusion, for she saw in her husband's eye an intention of presently inquiring to know what was meant by "Stenterello;" and, despite her residence in Florence, and some hazy associations with the name, she felt herself quite unable to tell him. But, at this moment, Violet entered the room on the arm of a gentleman; Masi started from his seat with a smothered exclamation, advanced towards them, and shook hands with the stranger. It was perhaps well for Violet that the general attention was thus diverted from her face, which suddenly flushed from brow to chin on seeing Masi, and then grew pale.

"What, do you know each other?" asked Mr. Higgins. And Miss Baines clasped her hands and exclaimed, "How very strange, isn't it?" And Mrs. Higgins, fanning herself, languidly observed that these coincidences might make a sensitive mind superstitious.

"Why I don't think our knowing each other so very strange," said the new-comer with a smile. "For we met in the most commonplace and every-day manner, at a *café*, where I was indebted to Captain Masi's courtesy for helping my lame Italian out of a hobble."

"This is Violet's cousin, Mr. William Chester," said Miss Baines; and then the two men shook hands over again.

"I didn't know that Miss Moore had a cousin," observed Masi.

"I scarcely knew it myself," said Violet.

"It is very kind in Miss Moore to admit the cousinship," said Chester. "I'm afraid it's only a far-away one."

"Oh no, not so far away," struck in Miss Baines. "Violet's father and your father were first cousins. Mr. Moore's aunt Sarah married a Chester, and I have often heard him speak——"

"That will do, Betsy, that will do," interposed Mr. Higgins. "There are times and seasons for everything. It won't interest Captain Marsy to hear all that rigmarole about people he don't know and don't care about." Uncle Joshua was alive to the probability that strangers might not be interested in the family genealogy of Moores and Chesters. Had it been Higginses, it would have been a different matter.

"You didn't expect to see me of all people here to-night?" said Chester, turning to Masi.

"Well, no; simply because you mentioned that you had no acquaintances in Rome."

"The fact is, I came under the wing of Miss Baines. She kindly got me the invitation."

"As to that, my dear Mr. Chester, you might have come with *us*," said Mrs. Higgins majestically, with some intention of snubbing Betsy Baines, and putting her in the background. But upon this, Mr. Higgins, perceiving symptoms of that tendency in Jane Higgins to "take too much upon herself," which it was his mission to correct, contradicted her in a loud voice. "No, no, Mrs. Higgins! Not at all. Don't you make any false pretences. I'm a stranger to Madame Gwarinny, and I shouldn't think of taking it on *my*self —let alone my wife—to bring any one to her house. Miss Baines is different. My niece, Miss Baines, is on intimate terms here. It is through my niece, Miss Baines, that you're here yourself, Jane Higgins. And when Mr. Chester says he came under Miss Baines's wing, he says what is quite correct."

At this point Nina came up, and taking possession of Mr. Higgins's arm, by a skilful manœuvre separated Violet and Mario from the rest, and gave them an opportunity of talking together. Mrs. Higgins was

consoled for the loss of the Duke by a substitute, in the shape of the fat Deputy, who was presented to her as a *Marchese;* and the two conversed in the French tongue, mauling and maltreating it as though an alliance had been entered into for that express purpose between "Ungrateful Italy" and "Perfidious Albion."

Meanwhile Violet and her lover exchanged a few hurried words. She was anxious to know how he had got on with her uncle. As to that Mario declared there was not much to be said. There had not been time to make any acquaintance. But he had discovered one thing, namely, that Mr. Higgins had not much faith in newspaper editing as a means of making money. Mario laughed as he said it, and observed that the old gentleman might find himself mistaken. Things had taken a good turn with the *Tribune* since he (Mario) had been acting on his own judgment, and against the advice of certain sage counsellors. "You don't mean Nina?" asked Violet anxiously.

"Why not?"

"Because she is so clever, and knows so much about business, and is so entirely our friend."

"Ah, *va benissimo!* But every one for himself in this world, *Violetta mia!*"

Then Mr. and Mrs. Higgins went away. But before they departed they invited Captain Masi to go and see

them—an invitation which made Violet's face glow with pleasure.

Nevertheless, in thinking over everything Mario had said to her that evening, she felt a little sense of dissatisfaction and disappointment. She wished he had not said those words about every one being for himself in this world; above all she wished he had not used them in connection with Nina. Of course he did not mean them in earnest. But she wished—she could not help wishing—that he had not said them.

CHAPTER VI.

As time passed, and the Directors of the Pontine Marshes Company made no sign, the Duke of Pontalto resolved to apply to Guarini; and he wrote him the following note:—

"DEAR GUARINI,—

"I send you a copy of the *Messenger of Peace* which I have just chanced to see. If you read the passage I have marked, you will see what they say about Lestro di Campolungo and Mattoccia. Perhaps you don't know that that property belongs to me. If the Pontine Marshes Company want to buy it they had better apply at once, as I have other offers. I wonder who wrote that article in the *Messenger*.

"Yours,

"FRANCESCO NASONI."

To which Guarini answered:—

"DEAR DON CICCIO,—

"I return you the *Messenger of Peace*. It contains a capital puff for the P. M. Company, which is

doubly valuable as coming from an enemy. I have no personal interest in the matter, not holding a single share in the Company. No doubt you do wonder who wrote that article in the *Messenger*.

"Yours,

"GIUSEPPE GUARINI."

Ciccio was a little puzzled at this. He did not believe Guarini's statement that he held no shares in the Company. And he did not understand how it was that the directors should neglect securing the land which was so indispensable for carrying out their enterprise. "Perhaps they think I shall make easy terms for them because I'm on the same side in politics," thought Ciccio at one moment. But he almost immediately relinquished this hypothesis as implying an incredible degree of simplicity—not to say idiocy—on the part of the directors. Then it struck him that they might be holding off lest, by any show of anxiety about the matter, they should tempt him to raise his price. But it was now openly stated that the Government had promised to cede to the Company for a term of years the lands contiguous to Mattoccia on both sides. It was therefore clear that the Company could not carry on their draining and planting operations without possessing also that estate which at present cut their property in two; and since the

purchase was inevitable, all further fencing was mere waste of time.

Upon this he wrote to Gino Peretti, asking for an interview. Peretti replied with almost obsequious politeness that he deeply regretted that he was then on the point of starting for Lucca on business. He should, however, be back in Rome in about a week, when he would have the pleasure of waiting on the Duke of Pontalto, or of receiving him at his own house, as the Duke pleased. Inasmuch as politeness was not common with Peretti, Ciccio took a note of it as a symptom of his wishing to cajole the proprietor of Lestro di Campolungo and Mattoccia; and he resolved to be adamant in making his bargain. He waited a week; ten days; a fortnight; but no communication came from Peretti. Meanwhile public attention was considerably distracted from the Pontine Marshes by topics of fresher interest and more general importance. The newspapers found other matter for their leading articles. A threatened interpellation in the Chamber on the subject was heard of no more. The shareholders had to content themselves as best they could with the vague prospect that the Ministry would "do something" next session. Ciccio began to fear that the golden opportunity of selling his worthless land for a high price was slipping away, and spurred by this

apprehension, he set off one evening for the office of the *Tribune of the People*, determined to find Peretti; or, at least, to learn where he could be found.

As he was passing along the Corso on foot, he ran against a man talking with a group of other men at the corner of a cross street. It was Peretti. "Oho, Signor Duca!" he cried, in his loud blustering way, "you've never been to see me, according to promise, hey?"

"I expected you to write and let me know when you came back," said Ciccio, staring at him with his dull light eyes.

"Lord bless me!" exclaimed the other, drawing back a step or two and slapping his forehead. "Did you? *Did* you? And I have been waiting to hear from you! How unfortunate! Never mind! Here I am now, ready to serve you if I can. What is it, eh, Signor Duca?"

"It's a business matter," answered Ciccio, slowly looking round at Peretti's companions, of whom one was Carlo Silvotti, and the other two were a Lucchese farmer and Colonel Smith-Müller, in a greasy frock-coat tightly buttoned to the chin.

"Business? What, you're not going into the oil-trade?" rejoined Peretti, with his own fine humour.

Ciccio was determined not to be baulked this time. He drew Peretti a couple of paces apart from the

others, and said in a lowered voice, "Look here! If you want that bit of land between Lestro di Campolungo and Mattoccia, you'd better make an offer at once."

"Bit of land—? Lestro di—? I don't understand, Signor Duca!"

"Oh, yes, you do," answered Ciccio, in his slow, cold-blooded tones. (Nina Guarini once said of him that if a codfish could be endowed with speech it would talk like Ciccio Nasoni.) "I mean the land in the Pontine Marshes. You'll have to buy it. It cuts the Company's property right in two."

"A-a-a-h! Pontine Marshes! Oh, *now* I see!" roared Peretti, not modulating his voice in the least. "Oho, *that's* what you wanted to speak about, is it? But I'm out of it. Got rid of all my shares and retired from the direction a week ago. Too many other things to attend to. But as to the land—why your papa, the Signor Principe, sold it, and pocketed the money some time back!"

It could scarcely be said that Ciccio grew pale, for he was never otherwise than pale. But his hue changed from a yellowish white to lead-colour. He passed his handkerchief over his face from forehead to chin; and then—slowly, deliberately, and to all appearance, phlegmatically as ever—Don Francesco Nasoni, Duca di Pontalto, &c., &c., &c., uttered a most tremendous im-

precation, which could scarcely have surprised his hearers more if it had proceeded from the mouth of his prototype the codfish himself. For an instant the other men looked at each other in amazement, and then they all burst into a peal of laughter, Peretti, of course leading the chorus, "*Bravo, Signor Duca! Bravissimo!*" he cried, wiping his eyes. And Silvotti observed, with his little dandified air of raillery, "Well, I thought I could rap out a pretty strong oath myself, on occasion; but you—! However, it shows what an advantage it is to have had a religious education."

Ciccio remained perfectly grave and impassive in the midst of it all. "I think," said he to Peretti, "that if my father has sold that land, he has sold what did not belong to him."

"No fear, Signor Duca! I have seen all the documents, and so has our lawyer. You need not be uneasy on our account." And at this there was another laugh. "But," proceeded Peretti, "I suppose your papa will arrange it with you. You'll settle the matter between you. Nothing I can do for you in oil? Good evening, Signor Duca." And Peretti swaggered off with Silvotti, rolling his head from side to side, and causing the passers-by to turn and look after him, as he broke every now and then into a stentorian roar of laughter at the recollection of Don Ciccio's curses.

It all passed in the space of a minute or so, but Ciccio remained standing on the pavement with a bewildered sense of having been asleep for a week or two and just awakened. Was it for this that Don Silvestro had been loading the *Messenger of Peace* to the muzzle with heavy charges, fired off in the interests of the directors of the Pontine Marshes Company? Was it for this that Prince Pietro Carlovingi had been scattering broadcast precious little seeds of suggestion as to the desirability of taking shares in it? All this in order to enable Gino Peretti to make a successful *coup* to increase the sale of the *Tribune of the People* and to put money into his father's pocket! Ciccio's intelligence did not move rapidly, and he needed some time before he fully grasped the news he had heard. But slowly he did grasp it. For a little while he clung to the idea that his father had in truth cheated the Company by selling them what was not his to sell. As to Prince Nasoni being above the suspicion of such a fraud, Ciccio gave little weight to that. A man who had already so scandalously compromised the interests of his heir, might do anything. And in fact he had no belief in any gold-dust grains of honour or goodness which might still linger in the muddy channel of Prince Massimo Nasoni's life. Ciccio was not without cunning, but it was of an elementary kind. He saw things in the gross; his own interests looming

large and distinct in the midst of a crowd of less conspicuous objects, which, however, he liked to be able to label in big letters. Things too subtle or too shifting to be easily catalogued in his brain he commonly ignored, or rather they escaped his apprehension. Ciccio had never done anything so bad as some of his father's actions; but he had never conceived anything so good as some of his father's sentiments. It was not, therefore, any belief in the Prince's unwillingness to swindle, but a conviction of Peretti's wariness against being swindled, which finally brought him to accept the fact that the estates near Terracina were gone from the illustrious house of Nasoni for evermore. He had been deceived, and led into a mistaken course, and cheated of his expected gains. When he was angry his wrath burned like a coke fire, with a smothered, choking kind of heat, difficult to kindle, almost impossible to extinguish. And he was profoundly angry now.

Although his errand to the office of the *Tribune* had been rendered fruitless, he mechanically pursued the road he had started on, absorbed in extremely disagreeable reflections. As he got into the more obscure and unfrequented streets, he became aware of the footsteps of some one following him, and presently he heard a puffing and panting as of a person out of breath. Without turning round, he moved his head sufficiently

to perceive that the individual who followed him was one of those whom he had seen in company with Peretti,—the man in the shabby coat buttoned to the chin.

Colonel Smith-Müller instantly observed that he was recognized, and, taking off his hat with a flourish, he almost compelled Ciccio to stop. "Have I the honour of addressing the Duke of Pontalto?" said he.

"Yes," answered Ciccio bluntly. Colonel Smith-Müller's appearance did not impress him with much respect. And Colonel Smith-Müller's utterance had a certain beery thickness which was not prepossessing. The Colonel fumbled in his breast-pocket, and took out a dog's-eared visiting card, which he presented to Ciccio. "I should wish the Duke of Pontalto to understand," said the Colonel, "that I am a mere passing acquaintance—not a friend; by no means a friend—of Signor Gino Peretti. That is the first point I wish to make clear. I am not a rich man, but I am an old soldier and a man of honour, and I beg to separate myself from Peretti and his proceedings in the affair of the Pontine Marshes Company."

Ciccio had been standing looking at him vacantly with the card in his hand. He now moved nearer to a street lamp in order to read it, and having read it, said sulkily, "What have *you* got to do with the Pontine Marshes Company?"

"I heard, unavoidably," pursued the Colonel, "a part of what Peretti was saying to you. And I perceived—unavoidably—that you were disturbed and surprised by it. There is a coarseness about Peretti, a want of the high-toned feelings of a gentleman, which I, although now but a rough old soldier, yet as a man of honour——"

"What do you want?" interrupted Ciccio uncere-moniously, and at the same time recoiling from the too close approach of Colonel Smith-Müller. The latter had been drinking, but he was sober enough to take keen note of Don Ciccio's demeanour. He drew himself up for a moment with a majestic air, as though about to protest against this cavalier mode of treating an officer and a gentleman. But then, apparently relenting, he tapped his breast, and said, "Signor Duca, I feel for you. I do, indeed. You have been badly treated. I, too, have been badly treated. I have been the victim of deception in my time. I feel for you, and can make allowances. Listen! If you would like a slashing article in the *Tribune of the People* I can get it done for you—for a *honorarium*. As an old soldier and a man of honour, I tell you frankly that I cannot afford to work without a *honorarium*."

"The *Tribune!* Why that's Peretti's own paper!" exclaimed Ciccio. And then muttered under his breath, "The fellow's more drunk than I thought."

Colonel Smith-Müller put his finger to his nose. "No, Signor Duca: the *Tribune* is not Peretti's paper any longer," said he. "But Peretti is only a stalking-horse. *Quoi! Sacerré nom d'une pipe!* There are others behind Peretti, who pull the wires. I know more than you think. Would the Duke of Pontalto like to find out how that sale was made?—who was the go-between? Ha! Is a man to despoil his own son for a ——? I intrude. I withdraw. I have the honour to wish your Excellency a good evening."

And here the Colonel made an elaborate show of turning away, keeping all the while a cunning eye on Ciccio's pondering face.

"What do you know?" asked the young man suddenly, in a dry, mechanical tone, as though the words had been jerked out of him without his will.

Colonel Smith-Müller wheeled sharp round, like a soldier on drill (somewhat to the danger of his equilibrium), and, once more putting his finger to his nose, answered, "Monseigneur, that is my secret. I have already informed you that I am not rich. And, although as an old soldier, and a man of——"

All at once, with an extraordinary rapid transition of manner, he stopped short, folded his arms across his chest, winked, and added, "*Allons! Jouons cartes sur table!* I can tell you something you'd like to know.

And I will—if you'll pay me. It's no use trying to gammon *you!*"

It had suddenly occurred to him that Ciccio had probably no illusions about honour, or principle, or disinterestedness to be played on. With Masi—even although Masi was far from taking the Colonel at the Colonel's own valuation—it was always possible to appeal to some ideal in him. To do so with Ciccio might only be to excite his incurable suspicion. The Colonel did not much misjudge his man so far. He rather gained than lost in Ciccio's estimation by this change of tone. The watchful eyes bent upon the Duke of Pontalto noted that he looked once more at the visiting-card as if to impress on his memory the name of an obscure *café* which was scrawled on it in pencil by way of address. But Ciccio was not to be hurried into any compact by a *coup de main.* "I don't know that you have anything to tell me which is worth paying for," said he; "indeed, I'm pretty sure you can't have. But if you like to write to me you can."

Then, without any further farewell, he tossed the dog's-eared card into the gutter, and leisurely walked away.

A most ferocious scowl darkened Colonel Smith-Müller's red and bloated face, and he looked with a murderous eye at the heavily-loaded cane he carried.

But the impulse passed in a second. He steadied himself, made a movement with his fingers as if to pull up a shirt-collar which remained invisible, and stood looking after Don Ciccio's retreating figure with an evil smile, which seemed to express in one concentrated grimace a whole life of blackguardism, treachery, and malignity. "*Va, ganache!*" said he. "Do you think to impose upon *me*, with your airs of *Principe Romano?* Fine princes, father and son! Ha! he's avaricious too, this white-blooded Don Ciccio. *Bon.* We'll see what can be done with the *Herr Papa.* Accursed breed, every one of them!" And then the Colonel staggered away in the opposite direction, tainting the evening air with a polyglot litany of oaths, strongly flavoured with beer and brandy.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Peretti had told the Duke of Pontalto that he had got rid of all his shares in the Pontine Marshes Company he had spoken truly. He had sold his shares advantageously. He still swore, whenever he happened to mention it, that the scheme was a magnificent scheme, a patriotic scheme, a scheme for which unborn generations of Italians would bless the names of its originators. Only he did not happen to mention it so often as formerly. His activity was directed into other channels. He was interested financially in the new branch railway to Porto Moresco which Bini in the Chamber, and Guarini outside the Chamber, hoped to push and pull through the Legislature; and he was interested politically in the trial of an injured gentleman at Bologna, whom the police had arrested for some warm-hearted utterances tending to upset the institutions of his country, and had then, with narrow-minded tyranny, detained in prison on a charge of

homicide committed some eight years previously. All the excitement and enthusiasm about the draining of the Pontine Marshes seemed to have exhaled itself in talk; and there remained behind, as the sole solid deposit, some thousands of francs in the pockets of two or three individuals, and a number of leaves of paper adorned with Government stamps and illegible signatures which proved the shareholders' right to participate in the enormous profits of the Company,—whenever matters should be far enough advanced for a dividend to be declared.

The collapse of such an enterprise in England might have involved ruin to many persons. In Italy the catastrophe was not so severe nor so widespread. The mania for speculation and the money to speculate with, are both rarer on the south than the north side of the Alps. But there were losses—inconvenient and, in some cases, disastrous losses. It was commonly said that the Clericals had been hard hit. Perhaps this notion derived confirmation from the demeanour of Prince Carlovingi, whose manner plainly showed depression and discouragement. It was known that he had spoken favourably of the prospects of the Company. And now every one said that Pietro Carlovingi had lost heavily. True, he was rich enough. But even rich men did not like to throw away their cash—perhaps

rich men liked it less than others. And the figure at which the Prince's loss was estimated rose from scores to hundreds and thousands of francs. When people talked to Peretti about how the Prince had been caught, and how Pietro Carlovingi, who was generally so reserved and cool, was quite unable to conceal his chagrin, but grew gloomy and irritable at the least allusion to the famous Company, the oil-merchant went into fits of laughter, slapping his thigh, and roaring out that old Carlovingi was an ancient fox, and the best fun going. And to his intimates Peretti declared, with irrepressible bursts of laughter and expressions of the warmest admiration, that "Carlovingi had never had a *soldo* in the Company,—not a *soldo! Vecchio pagliaccio!* He went about for a week or two hinting to every one that the Pontine Marshes were the real El Dorado. That was because he wanted Ciccio to sell his land well. And now that the other foxes have lost their tails he pretends to have been trapped himself. Don't you see? It's the best defence possible against any reproaches from his own side. *Vecchio pagliaccio!*"

But the comic side of the affair was not so visible to Mario Masi. He had built many hopes on the success of the Company. He had quieted many creditors, and had tempted some supporters to the very verge of advancing money to the newspaper, by the contagion

of his sanguine faith in it. The news that Peretti had abandoned the direction of the Company was the first blow. Then came the rumour that he had sold his shares, and the certainty that the Ministry would do nothing in the matter before next Session. And "next Session" in such a case was, in most people's opinion, equivalent to the Greek Kalends. Nina Guarini came to him one day in his office, and urged him to give up the paper at once.

"You were right about the Pontine Marshes shares, Signora Nina," said he, as soon as he saw her, by way of anticipating the "I told you so!" which he expected.

But Nina had no intention of triumphing over him. "I wish with all my soul I had been wrong!" she answered. "But it is too late to say anything about that now."

"I suppose you had private information how things were going?" said Masi.

There was a bitter insinuation in this which did not escape Nina, as though she might have induced Masi to sell his shares by displaying a little more candour. But she forgave it. She had been prepared to find him irritable, suspicious, and unreasonable. She passed over this speech, and set herself to persuade him to give up the newspaper at once. Here was an oppor-

tunity. The disappointment about the Company and his failure to realize his shares were an evident and valid excuse—if any excuse were needed—for washing his hands of the *Tribune* altogether. He had done his best. He had struggled on gallantly. Even his creditors could not deny that. And if he were now made bankrupt it would not be a dishonourable bankruptcy. It was contrary to his duty to himself and to others to persist in this losing game. Let him think of Violet.

He answered her sharply that he understood his duty, and needed no instruction on that score.

Still Nina showed no resentment. "Look here, Masi," she said. "If you were once out of this hornets'-nest of a newspaper some position might be found for you. I am sure Beppe would help you. I will undertake as much for him."

Masi's face brightened with sudden animation. "Would Beppe advance any money for the *Tribune?*" he asked.

Nina shook her hand decisively. "No, no, no; do not imagine it for an instant!" she answered, in her clearest and most resolute tones. "And how could we expect him to do so? It would be like pouring water into a sieve. Give it up, Masi. For Heaven's sake, give it up!"

"Give it up!" he repeated almost savagely. "It is easy for you to say 'Give it up.' If I am forced to give it up, I shall give up——a good many other things at the same time."

In fact, Masi had invested not only his poor little patrimony, the house and farm at Boscombroso, and the small capital in money, but he had, so to say, invested all his vanity, all his ambition, all his chimerical hopes of good fortune, in the sinking-fund of the *Tribune of the People*. He who had hitherto lived merely from day to day, and from hour to hour, accepting the pleasures and avoiding the pains of life as far as in him lay, turning his head away from disagreeable prospects, resisting disquieting impressions, with the *vis inertiæ* of his southern temperament, which clung obstinately to the enjoyment of the present moment—he, even he, had become gradually absorbed in his newspaper enterprise, to the exclusion of almost every other thought. There was something of the excitement of a gaming table about it to him, a constant succession of hopes, of chances, of combinations, and ministerial modifications, and political changes of scene—a vista of inexhaustible possibilities which needed only a passive persistence in hope, an eternal postponement of that decisive effort which was always to be made to-morrow, but which would

surely be rendered unnecessary by some brilliant turn of luck to-day.

Colonel Smith-Müller had acquired a strange influence over Masi. He had made himself the accomplice of Masi's self-love, and the champion of Masi's self-delusions. He had at that moment a scheme afoot, which was to produce an important sum of money sufficient to float the *Tribune* for a month to come at least. And what might not happen in a month? Masi was to have a clear half of the gains, without advancing a penny; merely as payment for his influence in obtaining an introduction to the Minister of War. The plan was this:—

Greece, as the Colonel could inform Masi, whom he trusted, but would on no account inform any one else, was secretly preparing for an attack on the Sublime Porte, in some of her European provinces. Colonel Smith-Müller had just come from Greece. His sister had just died in Greece. His sister's husband still lived in Greece. The Colonel had an extraordinarily wide connection through Greece: Liberals, old comrades, men who were ready to strike a blow for Hellas against the iniquitous Turk. The Colonel's religious sentiments usually got the better of him at any mention of the Moslem, and he would fall to cursing and swearing in his orthodoxy, and would have to be

brought back to the point. Well; the Greeks being engaged in these secret preparations, and having not quite so much money as enthusiasm, were casting about for every means of collecting arms and materials of war at the least possible expenditure of cash. Now it so happened that, of all things in the world, soldiers' rifles were what they were particularly short of. And it also happened that the Colonel knew of at least twenty thousand old rifles — old, but still perfectly serviceable—that were lying in the Italian military storehouse, having been superseded by a newer model in certain regiments of the line. To buy these old Italian rifles at a low figure, and to sell them—cheap indeed, but still at fully double that low figure—to the Greek agents would be an admirable *coup*. It could be managed with a little good-will on the part of the Minister of War, who would present the matter to his colleagues as merely an advantageous way of getting rid of disused material, instead of allowing the rifles to lie and rot in the stores, and take valuable space that was wanted for other purposes. Indeed, the transaction was to be represented as a purely mercantile one to the Minister. It would not be stated who were to be the real purchasers of the rifles. They might be bought as if for a German gentleman, resident in—say South America; and might be supposed

to be wanted for the equipment of the Equatorial Militia. "For," said the Colonel, puffing out his chest, "I am incapable, as an old soldier, and as a man of honour, of betraying the cause of Greece. Hellas is sacred to me, Masi; sacred. And I think if it's well managed we shall clear, at least, fifty thousand francs between us."

The Colonel's plan was complete in every particular save one: who was to appear in the matter as the agent of the German gentleman in South America? When Masi asked why the Colonel should not appear himself, and be presented by some member of his own Legation, it appeared that there were insuperable objections in the way. One was that the Colonel was not on good terms with the members of his own Legation on account of his too pronounced Liberal opinions in general; and another was that he was a marked man by reason of his notorious phil-Hellenism in particular. "No, no," said the Colonel. "The person must be a foreigner,—a non-Italian, but not me. It ought to be some one who might be supposed to have merely mercantile views in the matter. Can't some one be found,—for a small percentage?"

The word "mercantile" recalled to Masi's mind his English acquaintances. He bade Colonel Smith-Müller look in at the *Tribune* office that evening, and set off to Miss Baines's lodgings.

All this time he had not been assiduous in his visits to the Higginses. They bored him. And Masi, never tolerant of boredom, had latterly refused to endure it even for Violet's sweet sake. This was a disappointment to her. She had hoped that Mario would win Uncle Joshua's heart. It was impossible not to like Mario when he wished you to like him. But when she urged him to make himself pleasant to the old man, and to become a more frequent and familiar visitor to him, Mario had asked disdainfully if she supposed him capable of flattering that vulgar old shopkeeper for the sake of his pounds sterling. And to Violet's humble representations that there need be neither falsehood nor flattery in showing respect and good humour to an old man who stood in the place of a father to her, and even in refraining from contradicting him too roughly, Mario answered that those feminine tactics did not suit him. It was all very well for a woman; but he must speak out what he thought, and could not make himself a humbug to please any man. "Besides," he would add, when he was in a more lazy and less irritable mood, "there's no use in my bothering myself to go there. They don't want me. Your uncle has always got that hulking Englishman smoking and talking there; your new-found cousin."

"William Chester is a very good fellow, Mario."

"*Sarà!* I dare say he may be. But he's very dull, very prosaic, very positive."

"Dull! Oh Mario, William Chester is not dull; he is quiet, and perhaps a little shy, but not dull."

"*Cara mia*, it doesn't matter a straw what he is."

Kitty Low happened to be present once when Mario spoke in this tone of Mr. Chester. And she observed afterwards, as a sort of general proposition uttered over her needlework after an hour's rigid silence, that she thought it would be a queer way to reckon any bird's flying powers by the flapping of its wings; and that for her part she had noticed that them as soared the highest, fluttered the least. Chester was a great favourite with Kitty.

But now that Mario had the certainty that his Pontine Marshes shares were little better than waste paper, he suddenly resolved to make up to Mr. Higgins. He left Colonel Smith-Müller to go to Miss Baines's lodgings, as had been said, and as soon as he entered Violet was struck by his haggard face. But he did not tell her how terrible a blow he had received. He put a kind of perverse *amour propre* in persisting to Violet that all was going well. There would be vicissitudes of course; ups and downs. That was to be expected. Her dear friend, Nini Guarini, had perhaps told her

already that there had been a disappointment about some shares he held. No? Ah, well, it didn't much matter. Nina had had private information which might have been useful to him if given in time, but, as he had said the other evening, every one for himself in this world! It would all come right. Violet must have faith in him, and in the *Tribune*. Above all, she must be careful not to say a word which could make her uncle fancy things were in a bad way with the paper.

Faith in him! What was the faith he expected from her? She shrank from acknowledging to herself that she had no longer an unhesitating belief in his word, a fearless confidence in his sincerity. She extenuated as much as possible those deviations from the straightforward path which she could not but perceive. Mario's education had been so different from hers! Mario's views of what was binding on one's conscience—in minor matters—were the natural result of the different world in which he had lived! In great things he would be sure to do what was right. Poor Violet had already come to accept and excuse those aberrations in Mario from her own plain standard of right and wrong, the existence of which she had so indignantly repudiated in reply to Nina's warning. Faith in him? Well, at least she still had hope,—and charity.

"Do you think," said Masi abruptly, after sitting silent for a longer time than usual, "that your uncle would give you a *dot* now,—a sum of money in hand, if I were to tell him of our engagement and renounce any future legacy?"

She was startled, and looked at him with anxious eyes. "I—I don't know, Mario. I'm afraid not. It is not an English custom;—at least not in our class of life."

"I would give up all hope of a legacy, remember," he repeated. It did not occur to Violet to resent his pretension of "giving up" something that was hers and not his. But she foresaw very clearly that her uncle would certainly not admit any bargain of the kind. "You know, dear Mario," she said timidly, "Uncle Joshua isn't bound to give me anything at all."

But the idea had taken hold of Mario. He inquired whether Violet were going to see her uncle that evening. She said no; she had been on duty all the morning with Uncle Joshua and Mrs. Higgins, and had taken leave of absence for that night, to stay at home with Aunt Betsy, who was not very well. "You're not going, Mario!" she exclaimed, seeing him rise and take his hat. "Oh, I did so hope that you would stay this evening,—this one evening, when we might be quietly together."

"My dear love," said he, touched by the pleading face, much paler and thinner than when he had first known it, "I would willingly stay; how willingly! But I have an appointment I must not miss. A business appointment it is, *carina*. It is, indeed,—truly."

"Of course it is, since you say so," answered Violet. She felt indefinably hurt and mortified to hear him confirm his statement with such emphasis, as who should say, "I do tell a lie now and then, but this is the truth."

He looked at her quiet downcast face for a second or two, and then exclaimed, "What a queer little English creature it is! Some men might fancy you didn't love them——"

"What!"

"You're so different from the other women."

"What other women?" asked Violet, opening her blue eyes and looking up at him.

He burst into a laugh, took her head lightly between his open palms, kissed her forehead, and went out of the room.

"Where is your appointment, Mario?" she asked, following him to the door.

He stopped and looked back with a sudden complacent smile. "Aha! *Ci siamo!* You *are* a little bit jealous and suspicious then, after all."

"Jealous!" she echoed in inexpressible astonishment.

"Oh, I understand all about it. But my appointment, *cara gioja*, is at the office, with a terrible old Servian Colonel, who is coming to talk on an important political matter. You may guess if I wouldn't rather stay with you. But it can't be helped!"

CHAPTER VIII.

INSTEAD of going at once to the office of the *Tribune*, Masi betook himself to the boarding-house in which Mr. Higgins lodged, and was ushered into the little sitting-room, where he found that gentleman alone. Mrs. Higgins, he explained, liked a little society of an evening, and had remained in the public drawing-room. He himself did not care much for the sort of folks they had in the house just now. They made music every evening instead of conversation, and Mr. Higgins didn't like music. The old man looked lonely, sitting there in the foreign boarding-house with no companion but his pipe. Certainly Mrs. Higgins would have remained by his side all the evening had he commanded it. And certainly he would not have hesitated to sacrifice her wishes to his own had it suited him to do so. But Uncle Joshua was beginning to discover that there was a difference between the attentions paid him by his gentle niece Betsy, or by

bright, pleasant-tempered Violet, and those extorted from "Jane Higgins" by the over-ruling force of his will. Selfish frivolity may be coerced, but can no more be trained than the zebra, and makes but a bad yoke-fellow for the journey of life. But these considerations, if they passed through Mr. Higgins's mind at all, merely glimmered there in vague, indeterminate forms. And he had no idea of lamenting or considering himself otherwise than as a man with whom Fortune had dealt pretty justly, *i. e.* very favourably.

He received Captain Masi very civilly, and in his English manner of hospitality was about to order wine to be brought for him, but Masi refused this.

"Well, I don't know but what you're right from one point of view, though I'm sorry I can't offer you any refreshment," said Uncle Joshua. "It's poor stuff they give you to drink here. I take whiskey and water myself, not being able to swallow the red vinegar they call wine. If you come to see me at Dozebury, when I live in England, Captain Marsy, I'll give you as sound a glass of sherry as ever you drank in your life, and some of the best home-brewed ale in the three kingdoms."

"Miss Baines and Miss Violet are not here this evening," said Masi, hypocritically, as he took a seat opposite the old man.

"No, no. My niece, Miss Baines, is not quite well, and Violet stays with her aunt."

"She is so amiable!" said Masi.

"Violet is a girl that would do honour to any family. She's her mother over again—a thorough-bred Higgins!"

Partly the half-conscious sense of being somewhat neglected by his new wife, partly the mention of Violet's mother, revived old memories. And Uncle Joshua talked on, recalling this and that trait of Violet's childhood; softened by a touch of that indefinable melancholy which belongs to even the pleasantest association of the irrevocable Past; smiling almost tenderly, as he described the little one's prettiness and cleverness, and fearless truthful spirit, and saucy funny ways.

Of all that he said the phrase "Violet is a girl who would do honour to any family" had chiefly struck Masi, and taken together with Mr. Higgins's paternally affectionate tone inspired him with a sudden impulse. He had come to the boarding-house without any settled plan of action; thinking at one moment that he would try to interest Mr. Higgins in the Greek rifles scheme, at another, that he would cautiously sound him as to his intentions with regard to Violet. Now all at once he spoke.

"She would, indeed, do honour to any family!" he cried. "And happy will be the man who succeeds in winning her for his wife. I have long wished to speak to you, Mr. Higgins; to tell you how devotedly I love your niece, and how ardently I hope for your consent to our marriage!"

"What, what, *what?*" said Mr. Higgins, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and staring at Masi as if he thought he had suddenly gone mad. But the other, once started, went on pouring out a long and eloquent speech which his foreign accent (always stronger when he became excited), together with his rapid utterance, made unintelligible to Mr. Higgins as regarded the details; although he did manage to seize the main drift of it.

"Stop, stop, stop, my good sir," said the old man when Masi paused for a moment. "This is a very serious matter;—a matter to be very seriously—and slowly" (for Masi appeared to be about to start off again), "*slowly* discussed. I'll tell you at once that I should not be in favour of Violet's marrying a foreigner. Foreigners have a great many good qualities, no doubt. Oh, no doubt of it. But, you see, their ways are not our ways, nor their manners our manners."

"Oh, as to that, all the world is of the same flesh and blood. And I hope you would not consider it an

insuperable objection to be a foreigner;—especially if your niece's happiness were concerned."

"My niece's happiness——! Have you said anything to Violet?"

Masi hesitated for an instant before answering in a deprecatory tone, "I wished to speak to you first, of course. But you know that when a man is in love, it is not easy to hide it from the woman he loves. There are other ways of speaking than in words."

"That's true, Captain Marsy. And I take note of your fairness in pointing it out. But Violet's not the kind of girl to jump at the idea of a man's being in love with her, unless he tells her so. If it's only dumb show, I think we're pretty safe." Then seeing that Masi was about to speak, he went on, "Now let me advise you as a friend to give up this notion. You find some lady of your own country,—and I'm sure there are plenty of handsome women among them, with some of the finest eyes I ever saw in my life!" said Uncle Joshua gallantly. "You stick to one of your own nation, brought up in the same ways, and talking the same language. A well-set-up fellow like you, and clever, too, they tell me, needn't go a-begging for a wife. You just ask your friend, Madam Guarinny; she'll find some one for you, I'll bet a guinea. And the thing could be managed according to the customs of your country, you know;

without your bothering yourself, or wasting your time in going courting."

It was Masi's turn to stare now. He had not anticipated, he could never have imagined, such an extraordinary mode of receiving his declaration; such a cool fashion of treating him like a child or a savage who could be consoled for the loss of one toy by the offer of another! He would have liked to overwhelm this dull, pompous ass of an Englishman with a torrent of indignant sarcasm and contempt: to tell him that Italians had red blood in their veins, and not beer and sea-fog! But as he thrust his hand into his breast with an impatient gesture to take his handkerchief, he felt the crackling paper of a large square envelope, received just before he left the *Tribune* office. He knew well what it contained: a letter from the printer, which he had not dared to read through. He had glanced at it, and put it in his pocket. The recollection checked his explosion of wrath.

"Mr. Higgins," he said, with a melancholy and dignified smile, "it is too late for me to profit by all the prudential considerations you put before me. I may have done a rash thing in setting all my happiness on marrying a foreigner" (for the life of him he could not refrain from this ironical turning upside down of Mr. Higgins's insular objection to foreigners); "but my

attachment to Violet is too deep and too serious to be shaken off. You interrupted what I was about to say. I told you it was difficult to avoid speaking. I have spoken. How was it possible to be much in the society of a girl like Violet without loving her? And how, if one loved her, was it possible to avoid—"

"But you haven't been much in her society that I know of! You don't mean that this has been going on ever since she was in Rome before?" broke in Mr. Higgins, with a face which grew every moment more perplexed and pained.

Masi glided over this point. Love did not reckon by time. Half-an-hour in some cases was as much as half-a-year in others. And then, feeling the hardship of his own case more and more as he put it into words, he began a moving narration of the sacrifices he had made for Violet's sake. He did not regret them. No sacrifice was too great for the hope of winning such a wife. But the fact was he had had a good position in the army, and a fair competency inherited from his father. He was leading an existence agreeable in the present, and free from anxiety for the future, when Violet Moore came across his path; and from that moment he had had no thought but to win her. He had understood at first that she was entirely unprovided for. Later he had heard, quite by accident, that she was the niece of

a man in a fine position, a man of fortune—(" No, no," muttered Uncle Joshua, implacably honest as to a matter of fact. " A man in a good way of business, and universally respected about Dozebury and Charnham way.")—Well, that had made no difference to Masi, who was not a man to seek any woman for her money. He had set about to exert himself. He had founded one of the most leading newspapers in Rome : a newspaper which had been praised and spoken of all over Italy, and which had attracted the attention of men high in the Government and in politics. But it involved a life of anxiety, of occasional disappointment, of momentary embarrassment. The speculation in itself was certain to succeed. But a man of Mr. Higgins's experience must know perfectly well that there come moments in every man's business, when a sum of ready money can make his fortune, if it only arrives at the right time. When he had heard of Mr. Higgins's second marriage, he had of course been aware that Violet's prospects of inheritance, whatever they had been before, were greatly diminished. But that made no difference in his sentiments for her. He had made up his mind to come and say frankly to Mr. Higgins, " Give us a comparatively small sum at once, by way of dowry for your niece, and we willingly renounce all expectation of anything more in future ! "

He spoke very quickly, and rather loudly. And his manner conveyed a singular impression—as if he were reciting something he had learned by heart long ago, and which he was able to repeat as often and as rapidly as he pleased. But it was not so. He had not prepared beforehand one sentence of his speech. The effect spoken of was rather like that which may be observed in the performance of an *improvisatore*, than which nothing less apparently spontaneous can be imagined; —although persons who have never heard one may find that difficult to believe. There is too much tension to allow of any play of light and shadow. Mario's desire to put his statements in the best light, and to let nothing slip out which should mar his effects, gave him something of the anxious constraint, the forced rapidity of the *improvisatore*. If he had merely meant to tell the simple truth, it would have been different. The safe solid facts might be relied on not to contradict him or each other. But when one is not *quite* sure what is coming next—! And lies, like rhymes, must hang together.

Mr. Higgins listened with an air of depression altogether unusual with him. He, who was always equal to every occasion, ready to give forth his stores of wisdom for the guidance of others, and quite satisfied that he should be able to find the right course for

himself, had now an uncertain, bewildered, anxious look; and his bawling dominant voice was so subdued that Dozebury would not have known it. He dismissed Masi at length, abruptly saying that he was tired, and needed to think over all this matter quietly. Masi held out his hand before going away. "Will you not give me a word of encouragement, Mr. Higgins?" he said. "I can assure you I have need of it sometimes, what with one anxiety and another."

Uncle Joshua paused, meditatively looking at the outstretched hand. Then he said, "Well, if you'll excuse me, Captain Marsy, I think I would rather not shake hands with you just now. Not," he added emphatically, seeing the other flush angrily, and draw back his hand with a haughty gesture, "*Not* as meaning any offence to you. And if you'll take it as a passing civility, I'll shake hands with you all the same. But I am a just man, and I wish to do what is right. And I do *not* wish to raise up hopes and notions that are anywise contrairy to the truth. And you seem to me, if you'll excuse me again, to be a person that gets easily blown out with a very little puff of hope. Now you know lying hopes are like doctored wine; they mayn't taste bad, but there's sure to be a next morning's headache in 'em."

Masi's mind vibrated in so nice a balance between

two impulses,—the one, to shake the dust of Higgins's abode from his feet, and have done with him for evermore: the other, to save his own pride by treating the old man as an eccentric humourist from whom anything might be tolerated,—that it seemed to himself as if he were waiting like a disinterested third person, to see what would happen, and had no power of choice in the decision. Finally, he burst into a boyish laugh, shook Mr. Higgins's hand with a jesting assurance that the civility bound him to nothing, and bade him "good night" in a tone of voice which was expressive of making affectionate allowances for him.

At the foot of the stairs he ran against William Chester entering the house.

"Have you been to see the Higginses?" asked Chester.

"Yes; I'm just come from their salon. In fact Mr. Higgins sent me away. He is tired, and wants to go to bed."

"Oh! In that case perhaps I had better not go up. Unless the ladies——"

"The ladies are not there. They're both at home," answered Masi, completely ignoring Mrs. Joshua Higgins. And it was to be observed that Chester accepted this oversight without protest.

"Come along with me to my office," said Masi.

"I'll give you a cigar. I should like to hear what you say to a speculation I am contemplating."

"A speculation!"

"It is partly a political matter, and must not be talked about. But I know I can trust you."

Chester rather wondered how he knew it, and why he should trust him. The two men had met many times, but had never yet exchanged ten words *tête-à-tête*. This thought occurred to the Englishman as he walked side by side with Masi towards the office of the *Tribune*. It did not occur to Masi at all. "You know Colonel Smith-Müller?" he said.

"Well, I—yes; I travelled up from Brindisi with him."

"He's a strange fellow;—full of ideas. If that man had had a little capital to carry out his projects, he might have been a millionnaire. As it is, others have profited by them. So is the world made. *Sic vos non vobis.*"

"Is he a great friend of yours?"

"Oh, 'a great friend.' *Per Bacco*, that's a great word."

"To tell you the truth, the Colonel does not impress me very favourably."

"Well, one doesn't expect such a man, who has been knocked about all over the world, to be a model of what you call respectability."

"One is greatly disappointed in his case if one does expect it."

"H'm! I see you have a little prejudice against the poor Colonel."

"No, really I think not. I can't help seeing that he is drunken and dirty. But you can scarcely call that a prejudice."

"All the same he may have more ideas than the soberest and cleanest Quaker. But what I mean by prejudice is, that you English won't believe in a man if he differs from your pattern."

"I'm sorry to say this particular pattern is not uncommon at home. We have all manner of specimens, of dirt and drunkenness. We do not, however, as a rule, make Colonels of them."

Masi laughed. "Oh, as to that—! A guerilla kind of Colonel, I dare say. But you have no idea of the extent of that man's connections in Europe. The men he has known and been in correspondence with—*pezzi grossi*, what do you call them? Great wigs? Ah, yes; big wigs—would surprise you. He has been behind the scenes in so many political combinations! People little guess who are the machinists when they see the grand decorations on the theatre!"

"Is he mixed up in the speculation you spoke of?" asked Chester, as they reached the door of the office.

"He suggested the idea to, me, but"—dropping his voice mysteriously—"I believe there are political personages in Greece behind him—men who must not be seen in the affair. The Colonel is only an instrument. Shall I go first? Let me light a match! The staircase is dark."

CHAPTER IX.

"HELLAS!" thundered Colonel Smith-Müller "Hellas is my ideal, my idol! And you English, you whose Byron died for Greece, you who preach liberty and practise tyranny, what do you for Hellas?"

"Well," answered Chester, seeing that the Colonel paused for a reply, "I don't know that it was our business to do anything particular for Hellas. But if it was our business, I beg to observe that we've done it. Some people think we have a little overdone it. Did you ever happen to hear of the Ionian Islands, Colonel Smith-Müller!"

"Not your business!" echoed the Colonel, passing over the Ionian Islands. "Ah, there it is, my dear, my generous young friend. I regret to say it:—I admire, I honour so many individuals of your nation; but the policy of England in Europe is detestable. You may not know,—you do not know,—but as a man of honour I am bound to tell you that in diplomatic circles, in

social circles, in military circles,—*bref*, in all circles, I hear the most terrible things said of England."

Chester knocked off the ash of his cigar before replying, "Well, if you don't mind, I'm sure I don't."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Colonel with a cavernous unsmiling mouth and very watchful twinkling eyes. "There, my beloved Masi, you have a true specimen of the English *bouledogue*. He 'doesn't mind;' ha, ha, ha! But *I* mind. It pains me. It excites me. It occasionally infuriates me."

"Why on earth should it?"

"Because I am of English descent, of English blood,—nay, I consider myself in some respects as an Englishman."

"Oh, come, I say," exclaimed Chester, who seemed to think this far the most damaging attack on his country that had been made yet.

"Yes; my heart burns with generous fire—will you pass the *rhum, mon cher Masi!*—with intolerable mortification, when I think that Russia is going to sweep you all out of India, every man of you, bag and baggage! Your Downing Street is a Fool, my dear. And your India Boards are Blockheads!"

"Ah, I dare say they do make big blunders now and then."

"Blunders! They are imbeciles. And your *Corps Diplomatique. Allez!* Those poor gentlemen excite a smile of pity. They know nothing that goes on. Nothing. Do you know what is wanted for your Fool of a Downing Street, my dear, valued young friend? And for your Blockheads of Boards?" The Colonel stretched himself across the rickety table in the Editor's room at the *Tribune* office, around which he and Chester and Masi were seated, and folding his arms on it, hissed out in a melodramatic whisper, "*A well-organized secret service.* Well-organized, remember Manned by officers and gentlemen; men of the world, good linguists,—men who are ready to go through fire and water to carry out orders."

"Spies, eh?" said Chester coolly.

The Colonel started to his feet with a sudden bound which nearly overset the rickety table. "Great Heaven!" he exclaimed, raising his hands above his head. "Are not these English incredible? Incredible! I speak of a disciplined, organized, highly-educated body of officers and gentlemen,—old soldiers,—men who have fought and bled—*Grand Dieu!*—and all he can see in it is the vulgar notion of a—pah! The word chokes me!" Here the Colonel spat with much elaboration. "A fellow like your Bow Streets!"

"Oh dear no! Not at all like our 'Bow Streets,'

if you mean by that our police. Our police are a very respectable body of men."

The Colonel drew back a little, and folded his arms, regarding Chester with a majestic scowl. But finding that his frown was supported with stoical indifference, his brow gradually cleared, and he broke into a pensive smile. "Hah!" he exclaimed, filling himself another glass of *rhum*, "they are a singular people, these English. But I love them. I can't help it. It may be a weakness remaining from my childish days when I had an English *bonne*. It may be an inheritance of race——"

"Oh, no, it isn't *that!*" interrupted Chester. He seemed able to endure with philosophy any of the Colonel's utterances, save those in which he hinted that England might have the honour of claiming some share in him.

"What is it, then?" rejoined the Colonel. "There are mysteries in our construction. Deep mysteries, yet unsolved. I am somewhat of a mystic myself, by nature."

"*Basta!* Let us keep to the point," said Masi.—"You don't think then, Mr. Chester, that you would be willing to appear in the purchase of these rifles?"

"I am quite sure of it. I couldn't do it."

"It's a promising thing," observed Masi, wistfully.

"Promising!" shouted the Colonel. "It's sure! A certain success! And a percentage on every sale,—a percentage that would run to thousands—not hundreds—of francs. I don't know, but it seems to me that two or three hundred pounds sterling are worth just taking your hand out of your pocket to pick up! Nothing more is required than that:—the trouble of stretching out your hand—*Donnerwetter!*"

"I'm sorry I can't oblige you, Captain Masi," said Chester, without answering the Colonel. "But I assure you it is out of the question. It would be contrary to all my ideas."

Masi gloomily contemplated the end of his cigar which he held in one hand, while he passed the fingers of the other through his short curly hair. As he did so, a grey streak became visible near each temple. Chester felt an indefinable pity for him; although he little knew how much cause there was for pity. It was distasteful to him to see a man like Masi under the influence of such a fellow as Colonel Smith-Müller. Chester could not understand it. Masi was neither stupid nor ignorant. And to the Englishman it seemed that one must be both to believe in the Servian Colonel for ten minutes. He did not know that Masi expected grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles, in all matters connected with secret politics; and that

he was a believer in the wonders to be worked by the cabalistic formula of "a combination." To be sure the belief was very vague. But the beliefs which cannot be defined are often those most obstinately clung to.

"*Bene!*" said Masi, with a shrug as if he were shaking something from his shoulders. "No use in tormenting oneself. We must try elsewhere."

"If," said Colonel Smith-Müller, who had been furtively watching the expression of pity and uneasiness on the Englishman's face, "if I could dispose of a sum of ready money,—a thousand francs,—or say" (still narrowly watching Chester) "a couple of thousand *lire Italiane* in your beautiful paper money, my dear Masi, I believe I could compass the matter. A couple of thousand francs judiciously placed will do a good deal. And they would bear a high rate of interest. The speculation is good enough to afford that. But, *que voulez vous?* I am a poor devil to whom they don't even pay his pension regularly,—earned with the blood of a soldier. That's the worst of being hard up. For himself, an old soldier can bear it. But not to be able to help a friend at a pinch——!"

"*Basta, basta!*" interrupted Masi, almost roughly. He was revolted by this obvious appeal *in formâ pauperis* to Chester's well-filled purse. It was one

thing to ask a man for a service in exchange for which he was offered a share in a good speculation, and another thing to whine and hint for his assistance in the tone of a begging-letter writer. "We've talked money long enough," proceeded Masi. "It gives me a bad taste in the mouth after a certain time. *Non olet? Per Bacco,* I think nothing stinks so foully as money!"

"*Affaire de gout,*" observed the Colonel, passing a dusky handkerchief, which had been whiter when the week was young, across his dyed moustache. "I rather like the smell of it."

Chester went away with a depression of spirits. He had no special regard for Masi, whom indeed he had scarcely known before that evening, as has been said: but he thought him a bright, engaging, friendly fellow. And it seemed a thousand pities to see him the comrade and dupe of Smith-Müller. Chester nourished an implacable antipathy against the gallant Colonel, which had risen from passive disgust to active detestation during the hour just passed in his society.

"I believe the fellow to be a consummate rascal, as he is obviously a consummate blackguard," said Chester to himself, as he left the office of the *Tribune of the People.* "His bullying is objectionable enough; but his cajolery is something too unspeakably revolting.

One would like to have him flogged—by machinery. So that no decent hangman, or whoever it is, should be obliged to come too near him."

All this time William Chester had been lingering in Rome instead of proceeding to England. He said he was in no hurry. Why should he be in a hurry? There was no one waiting for him at home. His father and mother had both been dead for several years, and of his few remaining relatives he declared he thought Violet Moore was as near as any. But Miss Baines, searching among her memories of the time when she had kept house for Violet's widowed father, and had talked with him about his family, reminded the young man of an Uncle John and a first-cousin Sarah, who, at the last reports, were living in Surrey, and who would surely rejoice to welcome back their returning kinsman. But William Chester remained insensible to the voice of Nature—if the voice of Nature was supposed to make him yearn for the society of relations whom he had never seen, and who had left him to shift for himself after his father's death. "I feel a great deal nearer to *you*," he said one day in answer to a speech of Miss Baines's on the subject. "When I used to hear my mother talk of your goodness to her cousin Henry Moore, and how devoted you were to his little motherless girl, she always spoke of you as

'Aunt Betsy.' I wish I might call you Aunt Betsy. It seems to come so natural! May I?"

"Oh, if you like. Oh yes, certainly," answered Betsy Baines in her constrained, shy way. It might have sounded rather a grudging permission in a stranger's ears. But Chester understood her, and was quite content. One standing excuse which he alleged for lingering on—although there did not appear to be any reason why he should allege an excuse at all—was that he had not yet seen all the sights of Rome. The fact was he spent more time at Aunt Betsy's lodgings than was compatible with much sight-seeing. What little he did in that way was done in company with the Higginses, in order, as he said, to profit by Violet's Italian, Mrs. Higgins not having yet, in her husband's phrase, "brought herself down to the inferior lingo of Rome," to the point of understanding much that was said in it.

Chester saw the girl under trying circumstances; between the blunt arrogance of her uncle, and the falsehood and affectation of Mrs. Higgins. He saw her gentle, unselfish, and generally cheerful, although at times there was an air of lassitude in her young figure, and an expression of melancholy on her young face, which made him observe her anxiously. So far as he knew, Violet had scarcely any other society than

that of her aunt and of Mr. and Mrs. Higgins. And the latter was an eternally jarring element. "There is nothing so exhausting to live with as humbug," thought Chester. "Of course it is not a cheerful life for a young girl." And the longing grew in his heart to take her away from it all into a happy home of her own; to surround her with tenderness and sympathy; to give her the support of an honest manful affection. He dreamt of persuading her to go back to India with him. And he pictured to himself how he would tell her that if Aunt Betsy would come too, she should be welcome to share their home. He had thought that the climate might be good for Miss Baines, who always suffered when it was cold and damp. They should have their winter home in Calcutta, and in summer go up to the hills. Three years more in India, he reckoned, would give him enough to insure him and his wife from poverty. And then he would come home and practise his profession from the vantage ground of a small independence. He could fancy the light in Violet's eyes, and the broad bright smile on her lips, when he should tell her how he had planned it all. Of course he often had moments of doubt and trepidation. But then again he would grow hopeful. Every true lover has to undergo such alternations. Violet was always sweet in her

manner to him, and had come to treat him with a familiar kindness which she did not accord to other people. She appealed to his judgment; she asked his help for small services; she had even been confidential with him on the subject of some of Mrs. Higgins's astonishing manœuvres and deceptions.

Chester's thoughts were full of her as he passed through the streets, after leaving Masi, under the starlight of a fair Spring evening. It was not late,—scarcely yet nine o'clock,—and he thought he might venture to call and inquire for Aunt Betsy.

He found Violet alone, sitting in a low chair near the empty stove, and with neither book nor work in her hands. This struck him, for she was never inactive. And although her face was not well illuminated by the one lamp which stood on the table, he got an impression that there were traces of tears on it. He had opened the door unannounced; for Mariuccia had arrived at the decision that she might spare herself any troublesome ceremonies in the case of a relation. And, indeed, she never spoke of him otherwise than as *Il Cugino*—the cousin.

"Oh, Cousin William, is it you?" said Violet. "I was afraid it was a stranger." Something indefinable in the tone of her voice confirmed his idea that she had been shedding tears.

"No; it isn't a stranger. May I come in?"

"Yes," she answered, after a second's hesitation.

He entered, and sat down near her, observing as he did so that she withdrew her head still more into the shadow. "I came to see how Aunt Betsy is this evening."

"She has a slight cold, but it is nothing. I am making her nurse herself."

"Is she in bed?"

"Yes; but she has only just gone."

Chester got up, bent over the low chair on which Violet was seated, and said gently, "Violet, what's the matter?"

There was no answer.

"You've been crying!"

"A little."

He sat down again close beside her. "What is it, dear? Do tell me! Do trust me!"

She silently put her handkerchief to her eyes. The sight of her tears hurt him terribly. He winced, and drew in his breath like a person suffering sharp physical pain. "Don't cry, dear! Don't cry! Tell me what is the matter. I may be able to help you."

She could not command herself to speak at the moment, but she laid her hand silently on the back of his, with a confiding gesture. He took her hand and

held it while he spoke. "Violet, you are not happy. Your life is too uncongenial, your future too uncertain. You are always thinking of others. It is time some one thought of you. I think of you. I believe I have been thinking of you ever since the first day I saw you. Don't take away your hand, dear. Don't tremble. If you can love me a little and let me love you a great deal, we may be so happy, Violet. I do love you, dear —so much, so much; with every pulse of my heart. What is it, Violet?" he cried, in a startled tone. For she had suddenly wrenched her hand from his grasp, and pressed it to her throat, which was convulsed with hysterical sobs.

"Hush! Hush!" she gasped. "Don't say any more! Don't——" Then a burst of tears came to her relief, and after a moment she poured out the story of her love and her sorrow and her unhappy engagement, and her uncle's anger, and her anxieties for Masi. Her uncle had been there that evening. He had only just gone away. And he had said such hard things—not to her! No; he had been gentle with her: more gentle than she deserved. But he had spoken so hardly of Mario! "And now what you have said seems almost the cruellest to bear of all," she sobbed, pressing her hands to her temples, and turning her face away from him.

"Oh, Violet!" he stammered with trembling lips. "Oh, Violet!"

"Yes, it does. I have no one to help me now. I thought I could trust you. I thought you were like a brother to me; and that perhaps you would—you would try to help *him!*"

Chester was deadly pale under his sunburnt tint. His face and attitude had a peculiar stillness, as of a person half stunned. In all his hopes and fears and anticipations he had never expected this. He had scarcely seen Masi and Violet together. He had had no hint, no suspicion to prepare him for this revelation. It was all over. All the visions in which his fancy had placed her as the central figure, busying itself with the minutest details that were to minister to her comfort and happiness,—all gone, shattered, swept away like a rosy sunset cloud before a cruel wind bringing darkness and cold. He would suffer more later on; for a violent blow dulls sensation at first. But even at that moment he felt for her. The piteous cry, "I have no one to help me now!" penetrated his heart.

"It seems strange to suppose that I should be less willing to help you, because I love you more than you thought, Violet," he answered quietly in a low voice, which all his will, and his courage, and his man's pride could not make quite steady.

She turned round, and, taking his hand, kissed it with a sudden, humble, penitent action. "Oh, I must seem a selfish, heartless wretch!" she cried. "I don't know what has come to me. But I do grieve that I have caused you any pain;—although, indeed,—indeed, I did not guess it. And I do appreciate your goodness and forbearance. I would give anything to make you forget that you had ever—ever thought of me in that way. But I cannot."

"Neither you nor any one else can do that, my child. The only thing you can do for me now is to trust me, just as you did before."

Trust him! Yes, she could trust him; but not quite as she had done before. She would have freely claimed brotherly help and counsel from him yesterday. But she shrank from making any demands on his sympathy to-day. By degrees, however, he induced her to tell him more coherently what her uncle had said. Uncle Joshua had expressed the most decided disapprobation of her engagement. He could not forbid it, of course. He had no power over Violet. But he had told her that he should not only give her no money by way of dowry, but should cancel her name from his will, if she persisted in marrying Captain Masi.

"He may be brought to relent," said Chester slowly.

"I do not care for myself. I never built any hopes on his money. But it is very hard on Mario."

"As for that, I presume he did not propose to you because he thought you were rich." Chester could not bring himself to expend any pity on his favoured rival on that score.

"No, indeed. He knew I was a poor, penniless girl. But he has been making such sacrifices for my sake. Slaving at that newspaper, and sinking all his property in it. If Uncle Joshua would only give him some temporary assistance,—as a mere loan. But he is as hard as adamant against Mario."

After a pause Chester said, "Would you like me to speak to your uncle, Violet? I don't know that I can do any good. But I am willing, for your sake, to try."

She clasped her hands together. "Oh, how good you are,—how good you are! Uncle Joshua has such a high opinion of you,—likes you so much. I should not have dared to ask you——"

"What did you think I meant, then, when I said I loved you? I do love you, and I always shall. There, there; don't be afraid. I shall not trouble or distress you any more. But I don't mean to give up the privilege of being your friend, because I can't be happy as I had hoped,—I——"

His voice broke. He turned away. "Good-bye, my darling," he said hastily.

"Not 'good-bye,' Cousin William."

"Yes; good-bye. I shall see you again to-morrow, please God. But it is 'good-bye,' for all that."

CHAPTER X.

MR. HIGGINS had made up his mind that his niece Violet should not marry Captain Masi. Some difficulty there might be in carrying out this resolution, but he did not admit the idea of ultimate failure. He did not, however, refuse to discuss the subject with William Chester—a great proof of his esteem for that young man.

"No, no, Chester," said he, "this Captain Marsy won't do at all. A pleasant fellow enough, but not suitable for Violet's husband."

Chester gently endeavoured to suggest that perhaps on that subject Violet's opinion might be of paramount importance. But Uncle Joshua wouldn't hear of it. "The female character," said he, "is weak, and requires guidance. Violet is truth itself, by nature, but he got influence enough over her to make her deceive me, in a way. He's shifty, you see. I can't say that he told me a direct lie, but he let me think what wasn't true. Directly I spoke with her out came the truth!

This love-making has been going on for months. No, no; it won't do. I won't have it."

"I'm afraid she will be very unhappy," said Chester.

"Not so unhappy as if she married Marsy," said Uncle Joshua, confidently.

"But do you suppose that you shall be able to break it off, Mr. Higgins?"

"Certainly. I have a plan in my head. I shan't mind a little expense. I told Violet I wouldn't give her a penny, nor yet bequeath her a penny, if she married this man. But I'm not avaricious. She knows that. It isn't the money I care for. I've always behaved liberal to every one — especially to my family." But as to the details of his plan Mr. Higgins declined to explain himself. They would see. Least said, soonest mended.

It was not in human nature Chester should not feel a momentary elation at the thought of Violet's engagement being broken—a reviving gleam of hope. But it was but momentary. If Violet and her lover remained firm, no one had power to part them. The girl had a courageous and faithful nature. And as for him—it wasn't conceivable that he should give up Violet! To Chester's mind the poor girl's prospects looked terribly dark. Let the matter end how it would, he feared she would be unhappy. All that he

had seen and heard at the newspaper office recurred to his mind with a new and vivid light on it. Masi was an infinitely more interesting person to him now than he had been on that evening, and he recalled the minutest details of the hour he had spent there. He felt heart-sick and miserable.

Presently Mrs. Joshua Higgins came sailing and rustling into the room. She was full of astonishment, full of indignation, full of regret, full of anxiety. Of course Mr. Chester had heard the news? As a member of the family he would naturally feel it. But what her (Jane Higgins's) feelings were, no one could imagine! She had not slept for thinking of it. She had been ill—positively ill! It had brought on her nerves! What hurt her most cruelly of all was the duplicity of the thing. She herself was sincere to a fault. If there was one thing more foreign to her nature than another, it was secrecy—deception. She almost feared she should never be able to forgive Betsy Baines. Betsy Baines was really the most to blame. How she could have gone on looking her confiding uncle in the face, Mrs. Higgins was at a loss to imagine. And so on in a flow of words which threatened to be inexhaustible; the more so, that having said all she had to say never appeared to Mrs. Higgins a reason for holding her tongue.

Her husband did not relish this attack on his nieces. He had often boasted that Violet was "a genuine Higgins" in respect of truthfulness, and had even held her up to Jane as a model. And that ingenuous lady was now taking her revenge. Her tirade, however, had one effect that she had not reckoned on; it caused Mr. Higgins to spare Betsy Baines many reproaches. His wife's voluble animadversions roused a spirit of contradiction in him. He did not choose that his niece should be scolded by any one but himself. "Women," said he, "are always in extremes, Jane Higgins. It's lucky they are not called on to judge; for judgment is sadly wanting in them. You leave it to me to form my own opinions, and act according."

"I *hope* all may turn out well!" said Mrs. Higgins, with a mournful shake of the head. "But really I tremble. Violet—dear child!—is sadly obstinate."

"Well, I suppose you wouldn't expect her to be willing to marry a man one day, and drop him the next quite cool and unconcerned!" said Mr. Higgins, sharply. And then it occurred to his wife that she was not producing exactly the effect she wished, and had better be silent.

. . . . . .

Chester walked miles that day along the dusty roads outside Rome, absorbed in painful thoughts, seeing

little of the scenes he passed through. Trying to put the case fairly before his own mind, he told himself that if Violet had been his sister he should still have thought the match an ill-advised one, and that he was not bribed by jealousy and disappointment to think so. But Violet was not his sister. He was deeply in love with her, and he had told her so. How could he try to dissuade her from this marriage now? If he were willing to incur the odium of doing so, he stood at a disadvantage with Violet for the task. Chester had a deep nature, not easily ruffled by surface breezes. But it was stirred to its depths now. And his agitation was both more painful and more enduring than that of a shallower character can ever be. He had turned, and was walking back towards Rome along the dusty Via Flaminia, when he was startled by a loud shout, and leaped aside only just in time to avoid the wheel of a carriage drawn by a spirited horse, which dashed past him, and then was suddenly pulled up a few paces further on. He saw a hand beckoning to him from the window, and a delicate face crowned with waving masses of dark hair looking out. He recognized Madame Guarini, at whose house he had been several times since his first introduction there.

"Mr. Chester, I am so glad to find you," said Nina. "Let me carry you back to the town." He would have

excused himself, but she insisted. "Pray, pray come into the carriage. Never mind your dusty shoes. I so much want to speak to you about Violet." He jumped in and seated himself beside her.

Chester expected that Madame Guarini was about to speak of the troubles consequent on the discovery of Violet's engagement; he knew her to be an intimate friend of his cousin. But to his surprise she began by asking him if he could guess what cause of anger Captain Masi had against her (Nina Guarini). "A fancied cause, it must be," she said. "For I have never treated him otherwise than as a true friend." She went on to tell him that she had had a letter from Masi late the previous night—at past eleven o'clock. It was very violent and reproachful, and made some mysterious allusions to treason and bad faith on her part in the matter of a certain Company in which Masi had had shares, but with the details of which she need not trouble Mr. Chester. "But all that is not the worst. Masi will find out his mistake some day, and come round. Even if he does not—*pazienza!* I have never done him an ill turn, so I bear him no malice. What really distresses me is his forbidding Violet to see me or speak to me on pain of his sovereign displeasure!"

"Forbidding Violet to speak to you!"

"Those are his words. And she confirms them. Here is a note from her. That faithful creature, Kitty Low, brought it this morning, and told me at the same time of all the troubles they were in with the uncle. Ah, *poveretta, poveretta!* Please read Violet's note."

Chester, in profound astonishment, read as follows:—

"I don't know how to say it to you, but it must be said. Mario forbids me to come to you any more unless I would break with him altogether. He is so excited, and irritable and angry, that I can obtain nothing clear from him, but he says you have betrayed him, and done him harm. Oh, Signora Nina, what can it be? I am sure he is mistaken. I know it. You are incapable— I am crying so that I scarcely see what I am writing. Have patience a little while. It will be cleared up, it must be. Don't be too angry with Mario. He is deceived. I am so unhappy—not only for myself, but I seem to bring trouble to every one.

"VIOLET MOORE."

The young man looked up bewildered after finishing this note. "I see you know nothing of this," said Nina.

"I am stunned by it. Has Captain Masi gone mad?"

"Ah, *Dio mio!* This is a weary world. And the best thing I ever heard of the next is that there is no marrying nor giving in marriage in it."

"I gather that you think my cousin's engagement an unfortunate one."

"I can't deny it."

"I fear you have a very unfavourable opinion of Captain Masi."

"*Intendiamoci!* Let us understand each other. In some respects Masi is a good fellow. His code is not your code, but he has one: a little *en l'air*, perhaps; made up of prejudices rather than principles; not very reasonable, not very wise;—a code which has renounced religion as irrational, but retains an unshakeable faith in the power of the evil eye. And yet, with all that, Masi is a man who would sooner die,—I mean it literally,—than be dishonoured, as he understands honour."

Chester pressed his hand to his forehead. "Do you know," he asked after a pause, "how Captain Masi's affairs really stand? How his newspaper prospers? I fear he is terribly embarrassed."

Nina shook her head. Her husband had told her at one time that there seemed to be a chance of some political men of Masi's party taking him up. In that case he might be rescued from debt. But, as a commercial speculation, the newspaper would never pay.

"In that case, it would surely be the wisest plan for him to give it up altogether," said Chester.

"Undoubtedly it would. I have told him so."

"Then why on earth doesn't he?" asked Chester, knitting his brows.

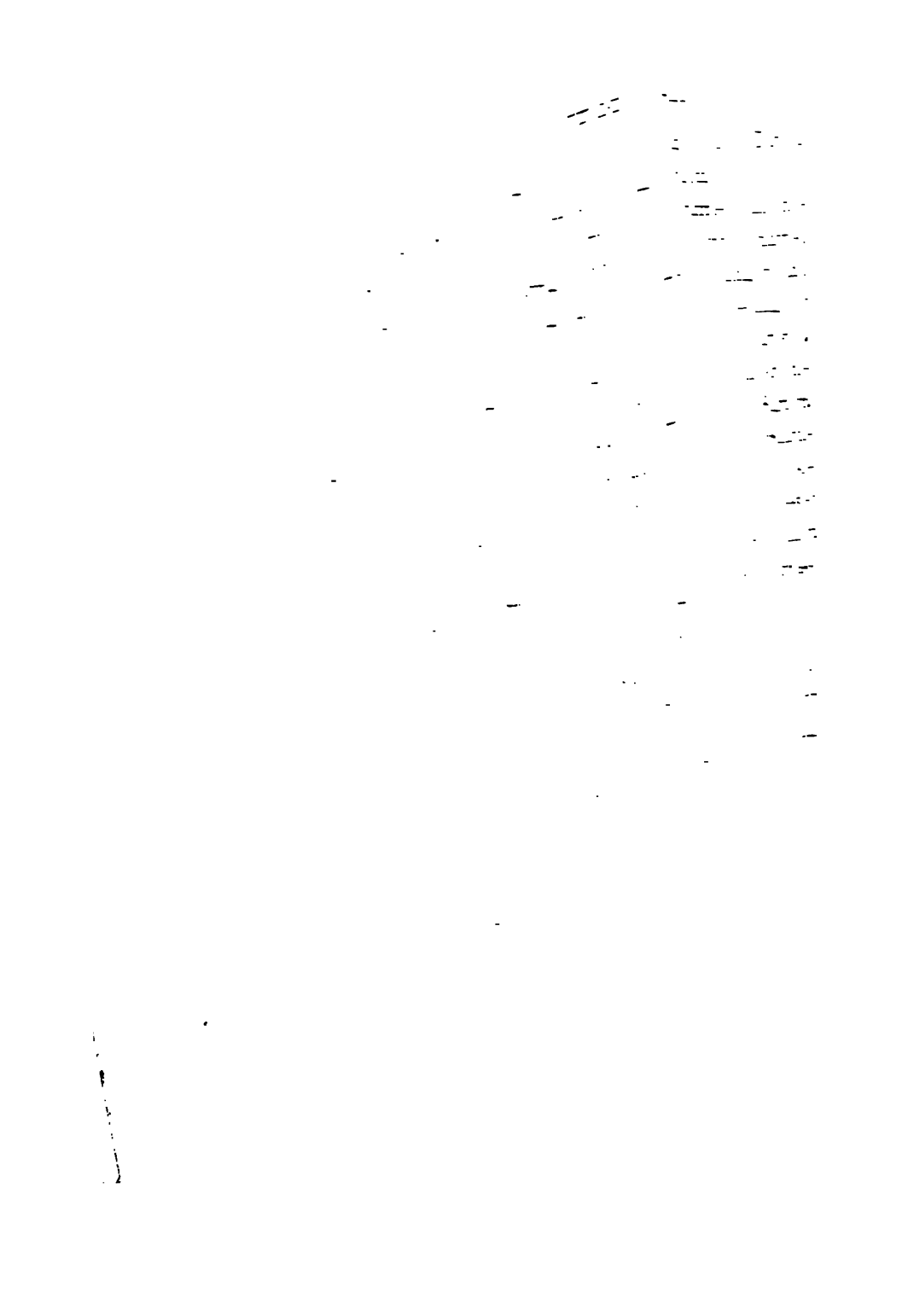
"He is an exceptional man who does not always act wisely," replied Nina in her dry, sarcastic voice. Then, after a second, she added, "But the fact is, that in this case there is mixed up a notion of honour, as he thinks. He clings to it, because—because——"

"Because he is unwilling to throw his staff out of work, and hopes to pull through and pay every one? I see. I can understand the feeling. But it is a mistake. They will only suffer more at last."

"It isn't exactly that," said Nina, with an odd look. "The truth is, Masi has so completely identified himself with the journal, has put so much pride and *amour propre* into its success—has rushed into the thing with the inexperience of a rash boy, fancying he was a match for—" she checked the name of Peretti on her lips. She was not going to revile any of "the party" to this stranger. "In short, he was a tool where he fancied himself a master. And now his notion is—I know him so well—that it would humiliate and disgrace him,—like abandoning his colours on the field,—to give it up."

"But—that seems to me to be mere selfish vanity," said Chester.

"I told you his code was not your code," answered Nina gravely.



did not press anything of the kind, but checked Smith-Müller when he tried it."

"Just like Masi. He is far too proud to importune you in that way."

"It occurred to me,—whether it might be possible that this vagabond, who calls himself a colonel, had prejudiced Masi against you?"

"Oh! Most unlikely! Why should he? I never saw him in my life. What countryman is he? A German?"

"He says he's a Servian. But, if I were asked to make a guess, I should say he was Russian. Perhaps a Russian spy."

Nina's face changed. The words revived painful associations in her mind.

"Humph! *C'est une idée,*" she said thoughtfully. "I cannot say I think it very likely, but, still—I will inform myself about this man. Meanwhile, if you see Violet tell her that I love her the same as ever. Don't let her think ill of me if you can help it."

CHAPTER XI.

PRINCE MASSIMO NASONI was in an ill humour. He had had a disagreeable interview with his lawyer. His creditors were troublesome. His mother had reproached him bitterly for the sale of the land at Mattoccia; not so much, indeed, for the fact of the sale, as because he had kept it secret, and because the money, instead of replenishing the family coffers, had disappeared from the Prince's possession with extraordinary celerity, leaving "not a rack (even in the shape of a receipted bill) behind." And he had observed some new wrinkles on looking at himself in the glass that morning. The Prince had not been his old cheerful, *insouciant* self ever since his interview with Nina Guarini. Unavailing regrets stirred in his heart. He would have liked to have had Nina for a friend still. He had not the slightest thought of reviving their old tenderness. That was dead and buried, and its ghost did not haunt him. But, somehow, he had a vague

idea that it ought to harden her at all events to the extent of softening her manner to him and giving her a sentimental interest in him. As to the wrong he had done her—his abandonment of her alone, young, and friendless, in a city like Paris; the cruel shock to her of his marriage, the breaking of all his vows—that did not greatly trouble his attention. She had consoled herself very soon, he said to himself.

But all his old admiration for her sense and quickness, for the energy and promptitude of her character, so contrasted with his own, had been revived and strengthened by that one interview. And he thought how good it would have been for him to have such a woman by his side, devoted to his interests, zealous for his welfare. He knew that he was fleeced right and left; having never been able, as he put it to himself, to endure the sordid struggles over every item of expenditure, which his son Ciccio faced with such a dogged determination not to be cheated. His mother, to be sure, would have been more than willing to regulate his expenditure and economize his means. But her stewardship did not suit him; for the old Princess, who made all kinds of personal sacrifices herself, could not be got to see why Massimo should not make any. Prince Nasoni, in his acute sensibility to his own discomfort, considered it very hard that Fate should have

deprived him of Nina, who would have been such an invaluable friend, such a charming companion, for his latter years. What good had his noble marriage done for him? It had produced an heir to the illustrious name of Nasoni. But the heir was an uncongenial, undutiful young man, who had never shown the slightest affection for *him*. Prince Nasoni came very near to considering himself a martyr to his high sense of the claims of ancient lineage, and the social duties incumbent on a Roman Prince. There are some natures that never can be brought to see that the impossibility of eating one's cake and having it is not a special cruelty and injustice in their own particular case.

The Prince was sitting at breakfast about half-past twelve o'clock in the day, when his servant announced that a lady desired to speak with him for a few minutes, if he were disengaged.

"What lady?" asked the Prince sharply.

He did not expect anything agreeable from the visit of a lady. He had recently been baited between his own lawyer and a hostile lawyer, as to the real ownership of a certain villa, which a fair claimant swore the Prince had bestowed on her absolutely. His own lawyer urged him to resist. The hostile lawyer urged him to yield; threatening the publication of letters, and the institution of a scandalous suit. And the Prince, at

length wearied out, and shrinking more from a public scandal than he would have done twenty years ago, had secretly compromised the matter with the lady, to the unspeakable discontent of both the lawyers, and at the sacrifice of an important sum of money. "What lady?" said he again, half fearing to see the occupant of the disputed villa appear behind the servant in the doorway.

"The lady says her name is of no consequence, but I was to tell your Excellency that she called some time ago, to arrange the business about Mattoccio."

The Prince sprang to his feet. "Ask the lady to do me the favour to walk in here," he said. And advancing to the door, he received the Signora Guarini with a profoundly respectful bow, apologized for the breakfast on the table, placed a chair for her, and, in a word, put on his most princely air of distant courtesy. But the moment the servant had left the room, he held out his hand eagerly, exclaiming, "Oh, Nina, what a joyful surprise! Do you know I was thinking of you but a moment ago!"

"Really, Prince?" said she, apparently not observing his proffered hand, "I ought to apologize for intruding on you in this improvised way. But the fact is, I did not want to lose time by making an appointment beforehand. And I thought I might venture to take my chance."

Cool, clear-eyed, self-possessed, perfectly civil, but no more soft or sentimental than the smooth, bright diamonds in her ears! The Prince felt chilled and rebuffed. But he had tact enough to accept the cue she gave him. "I can only repeat," he said, seating himself, "what I told you on a former occasion. I look upon your visits as a favour and an honour. And if I could flatter myself that I could do you the slightest service I should esteem myself fortunate."

"That is very good of you. The last errand I came to you on did not turn out so badly,—did it, Prince?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I got into dreadful hot water about that sale, Signora," said he. "The abominable democratic newspapers—— I beg your pardon; I don't wish to say anything offensive, but, really, the unbounded license of the Liberal Press is something frightful!" The Prince was alluding chiefly to some attack on himself in the *Tribune of the People*; wherein it was set forth—to the eternal disgrace of the Ministry, said the *Tribune*—how the chief gainer by the shameful comedy of the Pontine Marshes Company had been, as usual, one of the Black Aristocracy; the enemy of his country, the fanatical adherent to a grotesque and effete tyranny, and so forth. There had also been coarse and still more personal articles in a low periodical, which announced itself (not at all super-

fluously) to be "humourous." The Clerical journals had spared the Prince, being aware of the desirability of union in their ranks, and unwilling to make common cause with the "revolutionists" against a good son of the Church. But he had not escaped some severe reproofs in private. And he had come to a sharp quarrel with Pietro Carlovingi on the subject; which quarrel had with difficulty been patched up. All this Nina knew very well. But she knew also that the Prince had not made a bad bargain through her intervention.

"Well," she said placidly, "I suppose some annoyance was to be expected.—But you had the money, you know."

"Yes; I had the money," returned the Prince with a rueful grimace. "*Had* it, very distinctly in the past tense. I don't know how it is that I cannot keep money. I never could."

"Some persons are more unfortunate still; they can't get it," observed Nina.

"Oh, and I am beset by people of all sorts, who beg of me on the most extraordinary pretexts," continued the Prince, feeling it rather a relief to pour out his grievances to a listener who, if not softly sympathetic, still did not lecture him like his lawyer, nor severely recommend him to the interposition of the saints like his mother, nor sulkily reproach him with squandering

the family estates like his son, nor cry, "give, give," like that daughter of the horse-leech who had tried to seize on his villa. "For the last ten days I have been receiving a series of anonymous letters urging me to give the writer an interview, when he would reveal matters of the greatest importance; and invariably winding up with a demand for assistance in money, to be sent to certain initials, Poste Restante."

"It is easy to take no notice of them."

"Well, I have taken no notice of them. But their tone has risen in a rapid *crescendo*, from whining to bullying—almost threatening."

"In that case I should communicate with the police."

"I don't want to have anything to say to your police," answered the Prince. "In the old times I should have known what to do. But, now, these gentry would delight in dragging my name through the mire."

Nina did not insist. She understood very well that Prince Nasoni had too many weak points in his armour to be willing to brave publicity if it could be avoided; since there was no knowing what damaging facts might come out. "Well," said she, "I won't detain you longer than is needful. I merely came to ask you a question. A person in whom I am interested has quarrelled with me, for no cause that I can discover. I can only—after much pondering and puzzling—make a

guess that he has heard of the part I took in negotiating the sale of Mattoccia, and resents my having kept it secret. But I was bound to keep it secret. I had promised secrecy to you, and to others. The person in question has no reason to complain of me in the matter. On the contrary, I rendered him a substantial service. But he does not know that. And I don't wish him to know it. In consequence of a thought that occurred to me, I resolved to come to you and ask you if you had chanced to mention to any one my part in the transaction."

The Prince drew himself up. "I, Signora? It was agreed between us that the affair should be kept secret, as you yourself observed just now. I gave you my word."

"Yes, I know. But I thought it just possible that——"

"That I should break my word, Signora!" began the Prince in his haughtiest tone, when catching Nina's gaze fixed upon him with a singular expression he stopped short, almost with a gasp, and a deep crimson flush spread itself over his pale olive-coloured face. His confusion was so painful that for a moment he literally could not speak. Nina remained outwardly unmoved as adamant. There was something cruel in her cold clear look. In reality, she pitied Massimo at

that moment. But she told herself that her pity was a mere weak emotion of the nerves, unjustifiable, and almost contemptible. This temperament of Massimo's, so susceptible of pain from any hurt to his personal pride, so capable of feeling the humiliation of a false position even to anguish, so *in*capable of voluntarily enduring suffering for the sake of any other human being —what did it merit but contempt? She knew that remorse had no share in that burning blush, that stammering tongue. She purposely steeled herself by recalling the past—how she had been left to suffer alone, and to fall into an abyss of misery—perhaps of nameless degradation—but for Beppe Guarini's faithful, timely help. Nina could be tender, but she could also be hard. Injustice roused every fibre in her nature to revolt. She was not angelic. Her magnanimity often sufficed her to forgive, but seldom prevented her from despising. "I did not suppose you intended to break faith," she said slowly, after a pause which seemed pitilessly long to Prince Massimo Nasoni. "But people have moments of weakness—of forgetfulness. A word might have slipped out. But if you assure me it was not so, I shall believe you."

"It was not so, indeed," he said, in a muffled voice, while he passed a handkerchief across and across his face.

"Then, either I am on the wrong track altogether or some one else has spoken indiscreetly. Could Gino Peretti——? *Basta!* You will forgive me for troubling you?"

"How can you ask?" he answered. But the spirit and grace of his manner were quenched. He was still quivering with mortification at that unfortunate speech. Nina rose, and, vanquished by a movement of compassion, offered him the hand she had before refused.

"Good-bye, Prince; and thank you," she said, gently. The tears rushed to his eyes, and to hide them he bowed low over her hand.

As he did so, the servant entered with a letter in a square blue envelope, bearing the print of a dirty thumb and forefinger, and smelling strongly of tobacco.

"What is this?" said the Prince, at once recovering his haughty carriage of the head. "What do you mean by bringing me this now?"

"*Eccellenza,*" murmured the man, "the bearer is waiting. He said it was most urgent; that you would understand, *Eccellenza*——"

"Enough! You will not return here on any pretext until I ring for you. I am engaged." Then when the servant was gone he turned to Nina, eager to make a diversion from the unpleasant constraint which oppressed him. "This is an odd coincidence," he said.

"Just as I had spoken to you about my anonymous persecutor, he sends me another letter. I should like you to see a specimen of his style." The Prince tore open the gummed envelope, with an expression of disgust at its odour of coarse tobacco. "Aha!" he exclaimed, as soon as he had glanced at it. "He has ceased to be anonymous! Here's a signature. Alexis —Alexis—what the deuce is this name?—Smith-Müller?"

"Is it possible?" cried Nina.

"Well, it sounds impossible; but that is what he writes!"

"Strange! I have been anxious to get some information about that man."

"Shall I have him in here?"

Nina hesitated. "I don't know him by sight," she said. "But he may know me. I think I would rather he did not see me here."

"I'll send him away, then." And the Prince laid his hand on the bell.

"Stay!" said Nina. "See what he says. Your servant spoke of urgent business."

"Oh, his urgent business is to get money, I suppose. That's the urgent business of most of us." He looked again at the letter. "He says he has 'something to communicate which concerns some one very dear to

me.' Who is there very dear to me?" said the Prince, half aloud; raising his handsome elderly face with the blankness of that dreary question on it, as the moral and outcome of his life. "Oh, I suppose it's a mere invention. But he is very urgent. Only asks for an interview this time, not for money."

"Is it possible," thought Nina, "that this vulgar writer of begging and threatening letters can be the companion and mentor of Mario Masi? If I could make sure, I might open Masi's eyes, and save him from this scheming rascal!" Then she said aloud, "I am curious to see this man. And my curiosity is not idle. I have a good reason for it."

"Will you go into that little ante-room?" said Prince Massimo.

"There's a way out of it into the corridor. And, if the door is left a little way open, you can see him before you leave the house, without his seeing you."

"Yes," said Nina promptly. "I will wait until he comes in here, and then make my escape. I begin to see already that the information I wanted on this man's score will be all of one tint, and that black."

"If I learn anything worth telling you, you shall know it."

"Good-bye. And thank you once again."

She passed into the ante-room, bare of all furniture

save a bench running round the walls, and intended for the use of the domestics-in-waiting, in the days when Palazzo Nasoni had sheltered an army of retainers.

The Prince ordered the bearer of the note to be shown in. And noticing the servant's inquiring glance round the room, said, "You need not attend the lady to the door. She is gone. I conducted her myself to the private staircase."

The case was not so unprecedented as to cause much surprise in any member of the Prince's establishment. The man bowed, withdrew, and presently returned, ushering in Colonel Smith-Müller.

CHAPTER XII.

THE Colonel advanced into the room with rather more than his usual swagger—a not uncommon manifestation of secret uneasiness. He had given his rusty moustachios a new coat of dye; and they were black as coals on his red, bloated visage. Moreover he wore a double eyeglass of the kind called a *pince-nez*, with tinted glasses, which concealed his restless, twinkling eyes, and a good deal altered his physiognomy.

The Prince received him standing, and with the slightest possible inclination of the head. "I will ask you to be brief," he said, without any preliminary salutation. "I am greatly occupied."

The Colonel put down his hat on a side table, walked a few paces up and down the room, puffed out his breath noisily once or twice, uttered two or three expletives, and finally said, "This is a painful position, Prince, for a man like me to find himself in. I hold a commission. I have served in the field. I am an

old soldier and a man of honour. I have not been used to wait in ante-chambers, nor to be received on sufferance. Hah! Such is life. The fortune of war!"

"I will merely point out to you, Monsieur—Monsieur Smith-Müller, that the writer of anonymous letters puts himself outside the pale of courtesies in use amongst gentlemen. And, in fact, I should not have received you at all if your latest communication had not been signed. Sit down there, if you please."

The Prince pointed to a chair, on which the light of the window fell full, and so placed that its occupant could be well seen from the ante-room. But Smith-Müller did not take that chair. He muttered something about a weakness in the eyes which compelled him to wear smoked glasses, and made the glare painful. And he sat down with his face in shadow and his back to the light.

"Now, sir," said the Prince. "May I again request you to be as brief as possible?"

Colonel Smith-Müller coughed very loud, and gave a noisy sigh. "Prince," said he, "the chances of life have put me in possession of some very singular bits of secret information, which I have always endeavoured to use for the benefit of my fellow-creatures. For myself, I can say that my fellow-creatures have de-

served devilish little consideration at my hands. I have been hardly treated. I have been the victim of unmerited treachery. I had a fine social position which was ruined by—— Well, well, all this does not interest you. I shall come to the point." He got up, and again moved restlessly about the room, mopping his face with a handkerchief which he had rolled into a ball between his palms. As he turned in his walk, he stopped at the breakfast-table, and saying "Permit me! I am parched, and suffering from nervous excitement," poured out a tumbler-full of French wine, which he tossed down at a draught. He drew a long breath after it, which was almost a groan, and then resuming his seat, said suddenly, "You were in Vienna in your youth, Prince."

Massimo started violently. He had expected nothing less than this allusion. "Yes," he answered, with an extra dash of hauteur. "What then?"

"Some romantic circumstances occurred there within my knowledge—an elopement which made some noise at the time," continued the other man. The draught of wine seemed to have steadied his nerves; for he sat and spoke more firmly, and his eyes glittered more steadily behind the tinted glasses. "It is many years ago, now. Both parties are married since—not to each other, as I need scarcely say to a man of the world

like Prince Massimiliano Nasoni!" And the Colonel laughed his dry unsmiling laugh.

Massimo was in a fever of agitation, thinking of Nina's presence in the adjoining room, where every word spoken by that fellow must be as audible to her as it was to himself. He rose from his chair, and said brusquely, "I decline to listen to any more of this. If you persist I shall ring for my servants to make you withdraw."

For a moment Smith-Müller looked at the position of the bell, and of the door, as though calculating the possibilities of intercepting the Prince before he could summon assistance. But seeing the door of the ante-room, and perceiving that Nasoni had an egress that way, he relinquished the half-formed purpose, and changed his tone to one of entreaty. "I pray you, Prince! One moment. It was necessary to say those words, in order to prepare you for what is to come," he said, rising also. "You had better hear me,—*for the sake of the lady*, in whom I have reason to believe you still take an interest! If I am wrong there,—if the person in question is indifferent to you, then you are right in dismissing me, and I had better go elsewhere."

The Prince paused irresolute; wondering whether Nina were still within earshot, or had gone away after taking one look at Smith-Müller; doubtful whether it

would not be best to let her hear what passed if she were still there. The other man, seizing the opportunity of the Prince's indecision, went on rapidly in short sentences, keeping at the same time a keen watch on Nasoni lest he should suddenly spring to the bell.

"I told you both the parties were married since then. But the woman was a wife already at the time of the elopement. She left a husband at Vienna." Here he poured out a string of unuttered execrations in two or three languages, and going to the table, helped himself to a second draught of wine.

"Well?" said Massimo, "what of that? The husband died."

The Colonel set down the empty glass so violently as to break it. "He did *not* die. I know him. He is alive. The woman is a bigamist."

"*Santo Dio!*" exclaimed Massimo in a whisper. And he fell back in his chair as if he had received a physical blow.

"Aha! You see that I was right!" said the Colonel, following up his effect. "It was worth while to hear me, eh? Some credit was due to an old soldier and a man of honour, eh? *Parbleu!* Some men would have taken you at your word, and left you without another syllable. But I am too generous,—too forgiving. I

have forgiven too much. And with such cards in my hand, too! But there is a limit. I act for my friend, that injured husband, and I demand—observe, I *demand*. I do not implore,—an immediate subsidy for him. He is poor. He endures privations. *Sacré——!* When I think of that, and of others rolling in luxury, it makes me frenzied,—frenzied!" And he ramped up and down the room like a maniac; but never all the time so losing his self-possession as to remove a watchful side-glance from the Prince.

"Hush, hush," said the latter, nervously, "you must be more tranquil. I cannot allow this violence." He pressed his hand to his forehead like a man bewildered. Then in a low tone he asked, "Who else knows this, besides you?"

Smith-Müller stopped at once in his wild career, and laid his finger to his nose, with a gesture familiar with him. "Not another living being," he answered in a hoarse whisper. "No one but me,—and the husband, of course. I am the sole depositary of the secret. You have asked a practical question, Prince. You can safely make terms with me. I am empowered. I have full powers."

"Why did you come to me?"

"From a feeling of—of chivalry. I am an old soldier, and a man——" Here he was interrupted by

a violent hiccough. "A man of honour. And I was willing to spare the woman, if possible!"

"But why to *me?*" repeated the Prince, looking at him with a rising feeling of disgust, and the sort of fascination of repulsion which one feels in watching some foul reptile.

"Because I believed you were actuated by nobler sentiments than that *roturier* rascal Guarini. He is a paltry peddling rogue; and a poltroon besides. All that *blague* about his campaigns as a volunteer,—bah! Trash! Lies!"

"Keep to the point, sir!" said the Prince sternly.

"That *is* the point. I could not trust Guarini. He might have entrapped me by false promises. I don't know that my life would have been safe in Guarini's hands, if I had told him, as I have told you, that I was the only man who knew this. I came to you, Prince, believing you to have feelings of chivalry,—like myself; and perhaps some feeling more tender towards the lady. I did not wish to publish the story, if matters could be accommodated. I—*Bon Dieu*, I am in so excited a state that—permit me!"

He had emptied the bottle of Bordeaux, but looking over the table he espied a small decanter of Cognac with a liqueur glass near it, intended to measure out the *chasse* for the Prince's cup of black coffee which

stood cold and untasted on the table. He seized the decanter and poured out a dram, which he swallowed. "Yes, yes, I had faith in you, Prince. I believed that rather than expose the lady to a tremendous *esclandre*—in which your own name would be mixed up; for my friend has suffered much wrong in silence, but there is a limit. And he has *me*," (slapping his breast violently,) "to watch over his interests. I say I had faith in your being ready to behave like a gentleman and a Prince."

"What is it you demand? And what is it you offer?" asked Massimo, still staring at him with the same look of mingled disgust and fascination.

"A sum of money, to be agreed upon, paid down; and an undertaking not to molest the parties in question."

"Where is—your friend, at this moment?"

"He could be produced, if necessary. You shall have proof, at any rate, of his existence. Meanwhile I can produce his letters, empowering me——"

"Where is he? Perhaps you do not know yourself!"

"Pardon me! I—ahem!—I know perfectly. We are in constant correspondence."

"I ask you for the third time where he is."

"At this moment? He is far away, poor fellow! Enduring unmerited privations. At this moment he is—in Croatia."

"It is false. He is much nearer," said a voice that arrested the Colonel's hand in the act of carrying a second dram of brandy to his mouth. Nina was standing close to them with one hand on the table, erect and firm; her face white as that of a corpse, her eyes full of burning indignation fixed on Smith-Müller.

"Oho!" muttered the latter, with his shifty glance wandering hither and thither, but never for one moment meeting hers fully. "Oho! an ambush. A *coup de théâtre!* I should hardly have expected this from you, Prince; but from Madame, one may be prepared for anything." But, despite his audacity, his dirty hand shook as he finished his interrupted dram and put the glass down; and the coarse red hue of his face had changed to a dull mottled pallor.

"Nina, why have you exposed yourself to this?" said the Prince to her in a low voice.

"Do you not know him?" she returned, still with her burning eyes fixed on the other man's face. "The years have changed his looks since you first saw him, and he has done something to change them himself. But he is the same Casimir Laszinski still: false, and cruel, and greedy, and abject! A renegade to his country, a spy, a thief, a convict——"

"And your husband!" he roared, interrupting her with a brutal threatening action of his clenched fist.

Massimo made a step forward, but she stopped him with a little backward movement of her hand, very slight and contemptuous. She confronted the other man with a look of concentrated scorn and hatred, utterly devoid of fear. Her anger was of so much rarer and intenser a quality than his, that it seemed literally to extinguish it as the sun puts out terrestrial fires.

"It was you, then," she continued; "this begging-letter writer, this anonymous threatener, this cajoling, bullying schemer, whom I have heard of from time to time under a feigned name here; doing harm—what else did you ever do?—and spreading dissension, and instilling suspicion! You, Casimir Laszinski, whom I thought dead, righteously shot down, and the world well rid of him."

She was quick to observe and note that he winced and glanced round uneasily at every utterance of his real name.

"If you ask why he kept his secret all these years, I do not know with certainty, but I guess that he spent the greater part of them in the galleys."

The Colonel struck his hand on the table with a horrible oath. "It's a lie!" he stammered. "Old soldier!—Field of honour."

"Perhaps, too, there was little to be gained. Beppe

and I were poor. We led a struggling, wandering life."

Again he stuttered out an oath. The brandy—to which he had continued to help himself—was having its effect. "Not true—wicked falsehood! How should I know where you and that scoundrel had hidden yourselves? I searched for you through — through Europe."

"Whatever his motive was," she continued, utterly unheeding his words, but keeping her eyes inexorably riveted on his face; "one thing only is sure: it was a bad and base one. Why he came to you I *can* tell you. He came, because he thought to play upon your feelings, your pride, your memory of old times. Fear, or compassion, or disgust,—it was all one what feeling he aroused in you, so that the result was cash to him."

The Colonel nodded ironically, with a half-insolent, half-abject, wholly repulsive smile. Then he folded his arms, and shook his head with a drivelling attempt at dignity.

"If there be one man on earth whom one would have supposed that even Casimir Laszinski would have shrunk from importuning for alms, you are that man," resumed Nina. "But he was past all human visitings of shame long ago. How much I fear him you can see. How much he fears us, you may divine from

the fact of his having been in Rome so long, and never made one appeal to my husband——"

"Your husband!" shouted the Colonel, with a sudden lighting-up of intelligence in his soddened face. "*I* am your husband! Most unfortunate of men!" And his head dropped forward on his folded arms, as if he were falling into a heavy sleep.

Massimo Nasoni was trembling from head to foot, and great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. "Tell me, Nina," he said, catching at her dress as she was sweeping out at the door. "Tell me this one thing! You did not,—you did not know this man was living when you married Guarini?"

She looked at him with a gleam of surprise in her face. "Know it? No. If you ask me whether I thought his death as well proven as Guarini thought it, again I should have to answer 'No.' I had a feeling all the time that it was too good a thing to have happened to me. For years I expected to see him reappear, day after day, week after week. The feeling wore off at length. But it was prophetic, as you see."

"And your—your marriage to Guarini in Paris—?"

"Well?"

"Was it merely a civil rite?"

"No; there was a good old Polish priest—an exile—

who had prepared me for my first Communion, and whom my poor father had helped out of our poverty, who knew my story. He was a sincere and earnest man; and he did not gloss over what he held to be my sins. But when I was free—as we thought—he asked me to let him bless my new marriage—for he loved me. He is dead."

The Prince clasped his hands. "Oh, Nina, what a fearful misfortune! But you were innocent—you did not know that you were committing bigamy."

She raised her head with a haughty movement. "Do you suppose that I held myself bound in any case to *that?*" And she pointed with her forefinger to Laszinski, now heavily snoring with his head upon the table.

"N—no, no. Not to—to live with him. But a Catholic marriage, Nina! Marriage is a sacrament of the Church!"

She looked at him gravely; then at the drunken figure sprawling on the table. Then she gently disengaged her dress from his grasp, and went out without a word.

After awhile, the sleeper stirred, and rubbed his hands through his hair, and looked up blinking at Prince Massimo Nasoni watching him irresolutely; fluctuating between a hot impulse to summon the

servants and have him dragged out and thrust from the door, and a chill terror of adding another to the many scandals of Casa Nasoni, and furnishing the subject of Roman gossip from Trastevere to the Esquiline.

The Colonel (for we may continue so to style him) was used to sleep off drunken fits pretty quickly. He made a clumsy grab at the *carafe* of water on the table, and succeeded in pouring some into a glass. He drank half of the contents, and then proceeded to sprinkle some of them on his face; and to the Prince's unspeakable disgust, he dipped a corner of the tablecloth into the water and smeared his forehead and ears with it. "A-a-a-h!" he exclaimed, drawing a long breath, and rising more steadily than might have been expected, with the assistance of one hand on the table. "I shall now, Prince—for the present—withdraw. I am placed before you in an unfavourable light—by calumny. Time will do me——justice." He staggered to the door, the Prince staring at him all the time like a man under the influence of a nightmare, and with some vague idea that he *must* wake soon. Just as he was about to leave the room the Colonel turned with his hand on the lock of the door, and said with great solemnity, sometimes keeping his syllables wide apart, and sometimes running them

all up together, "Prince! I may have erred. But I have never—scoffed at the—holy—precepts of—my—youth. That woman—clever woman! And adorned with female charms—has no religion. *Mistrust—a woman—without—religion!* I have the honour—to say—*au revoir!*"

CHAPTER XIII.

IT will be remembered that Uncle Joshua had announced to Chester that he had a plan for breaking off Violet's marriage with Captain Masi. It was an extremely simple plan. He intended to buy Masi off. He had small doubt that the latter would accept his proposition. "Foreigners," said Mr. Higgins to himself, "don't look at these things the same as we do." Then he began to consider in what way it would be best to open the negotiation. He thought that Masi might be somewhat shamefaced and constrained if he were required to speak with him (Uncle Joshua) on the subject face to face. And he did not wish to write the proposition, for divers good reasons. Then it struck him that he might employ as ambassador that shabby-looking individual who was so frequently in Masi's society; and of whom old Giorgi, and Chester, and others had spoken as being constantly at the office of the *Tribune of the People*. "That's my man," thought

Mr. Higgins. "He looks as if he'd do a good deal for twenty francs."

The gallant Colonel had met the Higginses once in the street in company with Chester, and had given strong hints of his desire to be introduced to the family; but to these Chester had turned a deaf ear. The Colonel, however, could not be prevented from saluting the English family whenever he encountered them; and he had won golden opinions from Mrs. Higgins by the extravagant flourish with which he took off his hat to her. She thought it a very distinguished and genteel tribute; and was not at all displeased by the fact that it made all the passers-by turn to stare at her.

To the Colonel, then, Mr. Higgins resolved to address himself. And, keeping his design strictly to himself, he wrote a short note, and sent it by the hand of a *commissionaire* to the office of the *Tribune* newspaper. He knew no other address, but he had been assured that Colonel Smith-Müller was constantly to be found at the office.

In fact, the Colonel chanced to be there when the note arrived. He was alone in the Editor's room, to which he had acquired (or assumed) the right of entry at all hours; and had been beguiling the time by opening all the unlocked drawers, examining all the

papers, and reading all the letters he could lay his hand on. It was the day after his visit to the Palazzo Nasoni, and he had been anxiously debating in his mind what step to take next. He had seen that Nina did not fear him;—was prepared to defy him. She had probably destroyed his chance of making a good bargain with the Prince. His supply of money was running very low. He had had a spell of good luck at the gaming-tables of Monaco; but the proceeds of his play were almost gone. He had a long score at more than one eating-house in Rome, and it was several weeks since he had paid any rent for his squalid lodging. This latter circumstance, however, did not much oppress him, for his landlady was a lonely widow, poor and timid. She had already, in despair of getting any payment from him, hinted at her willingness to forgive part of his debt if he would but go away and leave her room free. And from that moment he had resolved not to pay anything at all. But how to provide the daily dinner and dram and tobacco was a more difficult question. What chance might there be of getting anything from Beppe Guarini? Beppe was no longer the struggling exile and conspirator of old days. He was a man of substance; and, in his way, a man of mark. He might not be so ready as Nina to brave publicity rather than come to any terms. With

a woman like Nina there was always the danger of her taking the bit between her teeth. What made her so dangerous and difficult to manage was that she would not spare herself. "I know her,—the she-devil," thought the Colonel to himself. "There's no power on earth, nor above it, nor below it, that can coax her or frighten her, if once she has made up her mind." And then he relapsed into melancholy reflections. They might, indeed, be termed tragical reflections, to judge from the expression of his brooding face. His encounter with Nina in Casa Nasoni he considered a great disaster. He had his own reasons for dreading its possible results. It was true, as she with her keen insight had said, that he feared the Guarinis. Certainly neither compassion, nor affection, nor repentance for his own share in the evils of the past had kept him from assailing them; and yet he had been many weeks in Rome and had made no sign.

He sat thinking over what had passed in the Palazzo Nasoni; wondering whether his state of intoxication had led him to say dangerous or imprudent words; trying to recall the whole scene, and cursing his ill-fortune that had brought Nina face to face with him at that moment. "As to 'face to face,'" he thought, "she might have met me face to face—has done so perhaps—and not have known me with the dark dye

and those glasses. But she had had time to watch, and listen, to hear my voice—I wish she had dropped down dead there and then!"

It was at this moment that Mr. Higgins's note was brought to him. He read it eagerly, with raised eyebrows and pursed-up mouth. In accordance with its instructions he gave the bearer a verbal answer. "Tell the gentleman it is all right. I will come punctually at the hour named." And then, when the messenger had gone away, he got up and walked up and down the room with an elated air. A hundred schemes darted into his mind. This rich Englishman might prove to be a mine of money. What could he (the Colonel) be needed for? No matter. It was clear at all events that he *was* needed. The note begged that the appointment should be considered "strictly private and confidential." Aha! That looked promising. People who required him to be private and confidential must pay him for being so; and pay him handsomely too! He was boastful and bullying in his revived hopefulness, even as he marched about the room there alone.

In a few minutes the door opened, and Masi entered, looking tired and jaded. He nodded silently to the other man, and flung himself into a chair.

"What news, what news, my beloved friend,—my gallant Masi?" roared the Colonel.

"No news."

"Ha? How are things going? Not badly? Surely, things are not going badly?"

"As badly as possible, and that's no news. I told you there was none."

"*Coraggio!* We must not despair! We must not let that bold spirit sink into depression! The affair of the rifles has failed, certainly. That was a blow. I lay it at the door of that blockhead of an Englishman, that Chester!"

"How so? You told me you had had a telegram from Greece to say that in consequence of the change of Ministry the influential persons who were interested in the matter could do no more."

"So I did. Precisely. But it's a question of chronology, my dear friend. If I could have got that pig-headed fellow to advance the sum needed—a mere trifle—then and there, we should have been *beforehand*, don't you see? And once I had seriously compromised myself, the Greek Minister of War—I know I can trust you, my dear Masi, not to mention his name—would have at all events seen me reimbursed for time and trouble. And perhaps he would have taken the rifles at his own risk and peril. They are noble fellows, the Hellenes. And after all, you know, the money would not have come out of *his* pocket. But that confounded

idiot of an Englishman lost us the chance. Well; it was not to be. I am somewhat a fatalist. I learned to be so among the Mohammedans." Then looking once more at Masi, and seeing him still sitting in the same listless attitude, and with a gloomy face, he said boisterously, "*Allons, mon camarade!* Never despond, —never despair! I have had harder knocks than you, my dear and valued friend. But Alexis Smith-Müller defies all hazards to shake his courage." He pulled out a silver watch attached to a black ribbon. "It is nearly time for my appointment," he said with an air of importance.

"Are you going?" asked Masi, who did not even raise his eyes as he put the question.

"Yes. It is rather a mysterious thing, and may prove to be of immense importance. I have had a private summons—I don't mind telling *you*—to the Roumanian Legation. If I learn anything that can be of use to the *Tribune*—and that may be told with honour, always with honour!—you shall have it, my dear Masi. Come, cheer up! *Coraggio, coraggio, coraggio!*"

"I wish to Heaven," said Masi, speaking as if in answer to his own thoughts, and without giving much heed to what the other man had been saying, "I wish with all my soul that you had never put it into my

head to mistrust Nina Guarini! I don't believe now that she meant to play me false."

"She?" burst out the Colonel with sudden ferocity. "I tell you there does not exist a falser creature in the shape of woman. She's the most treacherous, selfish, mercenary, utterly evil-minded——"

"She was a kind friend to me," interrupted Masi, still with the same air of pursuing his own meditations rather than addressing his companion. "She gave me good advice over and over again,—only I was too great a fool to take it."

"Did she, or did she not, manage the sale of the Mattoccia lands? Had she, or had she not, secret negotiations with Prince Massimiliano Nasoni? Did she tell you how matters really stood, whilst you were fancying the sale still to be made by Ciccio, and the Blacks ready to take up the scheme?"

"She was not bound to tell me,—supposing you are right in your facts. She did warn me to sell my shares. I'm sorry I wrote to her that letter. I was rash and irritated."

"You need not regret it. It is good for you to have broken with those wretches. Oh, she and that sly rascal Guarini played a double game. Friends with the Radicals, friends with the Clericals, making a speculation out of both! But they will be unmasked some

day. Why she was the mistress of that pearl of Princes, that noble, elegant, honourable gentleman, the Prince Massimo Nasoni? I tell you I know it."

"What is it to us if she was?" said Masi, with a sudden frown, and turning full on the Colonel. "Why should I rake into her past? Upon my soul I do believe that if ever there was a faithful wife in the world, Nina has been a faithful wife to Guarini. She might have brought any of the men around her to her feet, by just lifting her pretty white finger. But she didn't want any love-making."

The other man looked at him with a singular expression. "Even if she had the bad taste not to want it from Captain Mario Masi, that doesn't prove——"

"Bah! I'm not a boy to make any *blague* and pretences. I might easily have fallen in love with *la* Nina. Why not? But she was my friend; honestly, simply, my friend. When I think of it all now, I believe she was the best friend I ever had."

"You didn't think so the other day."

"I didn't think at all. I was in a passion."

"You were well inspired, I can assure you. Don't repent it. You will hear some frightful revelations about that woman before long. I am grieved to say it, my dear and valued friend, but she will be shown in her true colours,—she and Guarini. There are those

on their track who won't easily be turned aside. If you would have published that little article confided to me by that friend of mine——"

"Never! I will never attack Beppe or his wife with such weapons. I have told you so once. Don't recur to that proposition, or we shall quarrel."

The Colonel slapped him on the shoulder, and then shook his hand enthusiastically. "You are a noble fellow, my dear Masi! But it pains me to see your fine nature deceived. No matter. You will be convinced some day of the truth of my words." With that he swaggered out, murmuring that he feared he should be late for his appointment with the Roumanian Secretary.

Masi, left alone, remained for some time in the same brooding attitude. At length he roused himself, and began to turn over a little packet of letters and proofs that lay ready for him on his desk. The letters were nearly all demands for money, or refusals to advance it. His creditors were pressing, and those to whom he had appealed for assistance had one and all refused it on various pretexts.

As he sat there, the printer sent in word that he wished to see him, and without waiting for permission, shouldered aside the office errand-boy, who had announced him, and pushed his way into the room. He was importunate, and somewhat rough, but at bottom

not devoid of consideration for Masi. But he himself was the father of a family, he said. His children could not be fed on air. His workmen could not be paid with promises, and so on. Masi listened more quietly and patiently than was his wont. At the end of the interview he said, "To-day is Wednesday, isn't it? Things shall not go on unsettled beyond the end of this week. I have a prospect—I hope—of some assistance. If it comes, it will come before Saturday. If you will go on printing the paper until Saturday morning, I will give you my word of honour that you shall not print another line for me without the money in hand."

"But the outstanding account? It is heavy."

"If I get the assistance I hope for, you shall have half your claim down at once in ready money. If not — I shall give up everything I have in the world. When a man gives up *everything*, he can do no more."

Presently, after the printer had withdrawn, Gino Peretti bustled in with an affectation of great hurry and business. "Now, my dear Masi, what is it? I am run off my legs. I haven't a moment to spare. I wouldn't have come to any one else in Rome at this hour. But your note was so pressing—What is it?"

And when Masi began to speak of the possibility of obtaining a temporary loan for the *Tribune*, Peretti cut

him short at once, with his bustling pretence of candour. It was out of the question! Out of the question! He himself was in straits for money. Didn't know which way to turn for five thousand francs. That Pontine Marshes scheme had half ruined him. Ah! People thought he had made a good thing of it, did they? He only wished they had been in his shoes! He would make them a present of his profits on that affair with a vast deal of pleasure. No, no; owing to Ciccio Nasoni's having muddled matters, and not known his own affairs as he ought to have done, the upshot was that the only person who had made a good thing of the Pontine Marshes was that illustrious scamp, Prince Massimiliano.

Again it was observable that Masi endured the oil merchant's noisy harangue with singular patience and quietude. He was not usually so tolerant of Peretti's overbearing eloquence. "Gino," said he quietly, "I wish you would tell me one thing. It's all over now, and it matters little. But I should like to know whether it was *la* Guarini who managed that transaction with the Prince."

"Yes; she and I between us. But she was the ambassadress."

"That *is* true, then?"

"Do you mean to say you didn't know it? I thought

you would be sure to know it; especially as it was her doing to have those shares assigned to you."

Masi looked up quickly. "Her doing?" he said.

"Ah, well,—there, it slipped out. But I'm sure I thought you knew it by this time."

"Nina Guarini gave me those shares?"

"Oh, of course, it was the Directors who really *gave* them," answered Peretti, suddenly remembering the flourishing letter he had written on the subject in presenting them to Masi. "But *la* Nina suggested the mode—the *mode* of offering you that little tribute, as an acknowledgment of what the *Tribune* had done for the Company. In fact—well, as you said, it's all over now, and it don't matter; so why not say that it was chiefly her doing?"

Peretti was a good deal relieved and surprised to find Masi in so easy and little exigent a mood. He had come prepared for reproaches, and resolved, if necessary, to tell Masi once for all that he (Gino Peretti) neither could nor would do anything more for the paper. He had got off without a scene or a quarrel, and was consequently inclined to be good-natured.

"Come now, Masi," he said, "I hope you are going to give up this newspaper affair. It will never pay a *centesimo* as a speculation; and you won't get the Party to back you with money now. There are too many

irons in the fire. As a friend and a man who has some experience of these things, I *hope* you'll give it up, my dear fellow."

"I think it not unlikely that I may," answered Masi slowly. The other man looked at him in surprise. It was the first time Masi had even listened with patience to such a suggestion, much less seemed inclined to accept it.

"Bravo!" said Peretti. "Bravo! I'm glad to hear you say that. Good night."

"Good night."

"You mustn't take it ill that I don't throw good money after bad into this business."

"Oh, no. Especially as you have none to throw, and are half ruined by the Pontine Marshes Company."

Peretti laughed a little uneasily. "Ha, ha, ha! Oh well, of course, one—ahem!—one might scrape together a few thousand francs still. I don't say——. But where would be the use? It's all a lost affair;—a sinking ship."

"And we all know what sort of creatures make haste to get out of a sinking ship."

"And what else ought any creatures to do that have a grain of gumption?—crew, steersman, or skipper?"

"Well, perhaps the skipper, at all events, might—go down with it."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Colonel had very little idea what sort of person he was likely to find in Mr. Higgins. He had been told that he was rich, and that he was a provincial merchant. That was all he knew. Whether Mr. Higgins were likely to be more accessible to cajolery or insolence, what degree and species of lying would best go down with him, whether he were generous or stingy, hard-tempered or easy, shrewd or stupid—of all this the Colonel was quite ignorant. But he had no doubt of his own ability to get the better of the old man; having in general a swaggering contempt for the gullibility of his fellow-creatures until they had kicked him—materially or metaphorically.

Mr. Higgins had resolved to keep his negotiation with this person strictly to himself, as has been stated. But he took no trouble to make a mystery of his coming. He had far too high an idea of his own authority to do anything of the kind. He had simply

said to his wife, "You will be so good, Jane Higgins, as to go out of our private sitting-room this evening, and stay out of it until I send for you. I expect a person on private business, and I don't wish to be interrupted."

Mrs. Higgins had not the least objection to spend the evening in the public drawing-room. In fact she generally did so from choice. But she did not like to be turned out of what she called her own "salong." And especially she did not like to be kept in the dark on any subject. But she knew that open rebellion would be in vain. "Lor, Mr. Higgins," she cried, playfully, "what awful mysteries are going on? I hope you're not going to turn Bluebeard!"

"No, no, Jane Higgins," retorted her spouse. "I won't turn Bluebeard. I should never think of trusting you with the key."

Whereupon Mrs. Higgins flounced off. But she lingered in her bed-room, which adjoined the sitting-room, until she heard a step approaching along the corridor. And then she came forth with an innocent unconscious air, and found herself face to face with Colonel Smith-Müller. She was genuinely surprised to see him there, and at first did not imagine that he could be her husband's expected visitor. But when he had given her one of his most caricatured bows—

seeing with half an eye that he was safe in exaggerating any demonstration of homage to her—he passed on to the door of the sitting-room, tapped at it, was told to enter, and went in closing the door behind him.

Mrs. Higgins walked on a little way, and then stood still hesitating for full a minute in the lighted corridor. Finally she turned, and went back very softly to her bed-room. She found her husband at the door preparing to lock it. "What do you want here, Jane Higgins?" said he. "I thought you had gone to the drawing-room."

"So I had. I only came back for my handkerchief. Why on earth do you lock the door?"

"You get your handkerchief and I'll tell you. Found it? Well then, I lock this door so as no one shall slip in and listen through the thin partition to what me and the person with me are saying."

Mrs. Higgins flushed crimson. "Goodness me, Mr. Higgins," she exclaimed. "I can't think how you can suspect such things! How do they come into your head? *I* should never have thought of such a mean idea. I hate suspiciousness!"

But her husband had spoken in all good faith, and without the faintest thought of suspecting *her*. "Well, suspiciousness ain't a good thing, nor a pleasant thing,"

he answered, gravely. "And I'm glad to find you're not apt at it, Jane. Now go to the drawing-room, and leave me to my business."

"Hah!" said the Colonel, when the two men were alone. "You've fastened that door? Right, sir, right! Your precaution is a wise one."

"It was *your* precaution, to give the devil his due," answered Mr. Higgins. And then he added explanatorily, "That's a common saying in the English language, you understand, and don't mean anything personal, Colonel Smith."

"My dear sir, I quite understand. Your idiom was once familiar to me as my own."

"Was it, though? And what *is* your own? For I'm sure I don't rightly know."

"My native language is—ahem!—is Servian. But I speak also Russian, Polish, German, French, a little Turkish, a little Italian, and a little English, as you hear!"

"Lord bless me! It must be very useful to you to know so many languages."

"It has been in my time;—very useful. And you," with a superior smile; for he began to fancy this old provincial was simple, and might be overawed; "you speak no foreign tongues—no?"

"Not a word."

"Is it possible? Ha! A great disadvantage. It's lucky for you that some people take the trouble to speak your language, my good sir."

"Well, it ain't unlucky for them either. I suppose you find it worth your while to speak Russian and Prussian and Turkish, and all the rest. It suits your line of life, no doubt. You haven't learnt 'em to oblige the Russians and the Prussians, and you don't expect the Russians and the Prussians to be grateful to you. I've seen a good deal of the world, Colonel Smith, and I look into things for myself, framing my own judgments, which are mostly correct."

The Colonel was slightly thrown out in his calculation. But he resolved to try once more if he could not quell or dazzle Mr. Higgins in another way. "Sir," said he, assuming a military attitude and inflating his chest, "when you talk to me of knowing the world, you talk to a man who has had an experience probably unmatched in Europe. I have been intimate with crowned heads, and have shared my rations with the humble conscript on the battle-field. Princes and Hospodars have been my comrades; and I know the private history of every great family on the Continent."

"Ah! Not a very respectable lot, I'm afraid," returned Mr. Higgins, shaking his head. "However,

it's our duty to make allowances, and to judge 'em according to their bringing up."

Then the Colonel relinquished all hope of overwhelming this thick-skulled Briton by the brilliancy of his boastings, and said to himself that against stupidity the gods themselves fight in vain.

"No, no," pursued Mr. Higgins, perceiving an opening to introduce the topic he had at heart. "It ain't fair to judge 'em otherwise than according to their bringing up. Now, with respect to foreigners; —I always say that we must not expect foreigners to look at things the same as we do. As to marrying, now, foreigners have very different views from ourselves."

The Colonel opened his ears, and half closed his twinkling eyes, and wondered very much what was coming next. But he merely made a silent gesture of assent.

"I sent for you, Colonel Smith, to talk to you about a matter of a private nature."

"And I did not hesitate for an instant to come to you, although I will not conceal from you that I have postponed business of a rather lucrative nature to attend your summons."

"Ay, ay; we'll put all that right. I don't mean to take up your time without remunerating you for it."

The Colonel thought this sounded promising, and brightened up immediately. "My dear, my revered sir," he said; "I am a poor man,—a poor soldier. Why should I be ashamed to own it? In the words of the great Napoleon I may say, '*Tout est perdu fors l'honneur;*' all is lost save honour,—save honour."

"Did *he* say that?"

"Certainly. It was—if my memory serves me—immediately after the celebrated Battle of Waterloo."

"Then it was as big a lie as ever he told in his life. However, we'll stick to our business, and never mind Bonyparty. You're a great friend, I am told, of Captain Marsy?"

The Colonel declared himself to be Masi's dearest and most intimate friend. He had advised Masi on many points of importance; had guided him by the light of his experience. If Masi would always have listened to him, things would have gone better with Masi.

"Then, since you're so deep in his confidence," said Mr. Higgins, "no doubt you've heard talk of his marrying a young lady—my great niece, in fact."

The Colonel had not heard a word of it until that moment; but he did not choose to confess so. And in order not to compromise himself, he put on a mysterious look, and nodded slowly and emphatically several times

without speaking. Then Mr. Higgins in a few plain words told him that the young lady's family disapproved of the marriage, and that she would not have a penny if she married against her uncle's will; moreover, that Captain Masi had been told as much, and nevertheless seemed inclined to persist.

"I'm astonished!" said the Colonel. As indeed he was. "And the lady's sentiments?" he inquired, after a short pause, with a cunning look.

"We need not discuss the lady's sentiments. The lady considers herself bound by her promise, that's all we need consider. Now I want Captain Marsy to give her her promise back."

"Aha!" The Colonel began to scent a paying job for himself out of this business. "But how could we demand such a sacrifice from our dear Masi? I put it to you, my most honoured sir—how could we? Especially as he, perhaps, hopes that you—with your noble and affectionate nature—would be melted by the voice of True Love, to the extent of a modest *dot* —a marriage portion—humph?"

"You've travelled a good deal, Colonel Smith," returned Mr. Higgins, slowly, "but I dare say you've never been in Dozebury. If you knew Dozebury folks, you'd understand that when Joshua Higgins says a thing he means it." The way in which the tight

straight lips closed after this speech was more convincing than the words themselves.

"Then," said the Colonel, rubbing his hands over his scrub of cropped grey hair, "I don't quite see a way out of this sad—this truly affecting position."

"The way out of it that I have thought of, is this," answered Mr. Higgins. "Captain Marsy is in want of money. His business affairs are in a bad way, and if he marries a young woman without a farthing, that won't mend them. I'm willing to advance Captain Marsy a sum of money down in hard cash, if he will give me an undertaking in writing to relinquish all claim to marry my niece."

The Colonel stared at him eagerly. "And have you mentioned this to Masi?" he asked.

"No, I have not. I sent for you with the idea of getting you to mention it to him. I thought he might feel a little awkward in talking it over with me; and that it would be best to employ a third party who had no personal feeling in the matter."

The Colonel got up, seized Mr. Higgins's hands, shook them enthusiastically, and began to walk about the room in an excited way. "The thought does you honour, my dear sir! It is a thought of striking delicacy worthy of your exalted character. And if there is a man on earth who can carry the thing

through, it is I. I have a hold on Masi. He trusts me, he respects me. But it will not be an easy task even for me. There will be frightful wear and tear of the nervous system, my very dear and venerated sir!"

"You'll be doing a good work for your friend if you can persuade him. It will be far the best arrangement for his interests."

"That thought will chiefly sustain me in the arduous task;—that is to say, if I am able to undertake it. My pecuniary circumstances render a prolonged stay in Rome very difficult for me at this moment. In fact, when your note reached me I had made all my arrangements for starting for Bosnia the day after to-morrow. I have a rather pressing affair there."

Mr. Higgins thought this difficulty could be got over. And then they came to the terms of the bargain. Colonel Smith-Müller's pretensions were at first very extravagant. But after some haggling he brought them down to a sum which Mr. Higgins consented to give. "If I were a rich grocer, instead of a poor devil of a soldier who has fought and bled on the field," said he, a little ruffled by Mr. Higgins's unexpected toughness at a bargain, "I would not receive a *centime* in such a cause. There are services that cannot be paid for. But expenses out of pocket—prolonged

sojourn in Rome, loss of money owing to my absence from Bosnia—*these*, my honest poverty compel me to accept."

"Well, you do your best, and you'll be paid fair and full," said Mr. Higgins, perfectly unmoved by this flourish.

"We must proceed cautiously," returned the other. "Masi is as proud as Lucifer. I shall go heart and soul into your mission, believe me. And I'm perhaps the only man existing, who is capable of carrying it through!"

Nevertheless, as he walked away from the boarding-house the Colonel did not clearly see his way to success. Of course a man who understood his own interests would jump at the offer. But Masi was utterly wrong-headed on so many points. The idea of his wanting to marry a penniless girl was in itself, under all the circumstances, sheer stark madness! And the sudden swinging back to his infatuation for the Guarinis was the most idiotic, romantic folly! No; the task would not be easy. But in one way or another the Colonel believed he should be able to gain a good deal of money for himself out of it. "And once I have a thousand francs in hand," thought he, "I'll be off. I won't stay here. The atmosphere is getting unwholesome. It isn't worth while to run any risks

for the chance of screwing anything out of that white-faced dog, Ciccio Nasoni, or from the pious Don Giovanni, his father. If that accursed woman hadn't recognized me, I might still have had a good game to play here, but as it is——what's that?" He stopped with a great start. A man had brushed past him suddenly. He must have come out of a doorway, for no footsteps had been audible. "Ha! By ——!" muttered the Colonel, as he wiped his face, on which the perspiration had started out, "my nerve isn't what it used to be."

The man, evidently a stranger, went along the street before him, looking up at the numbers on the doorways by the dim light. He failed, apparently, to find the house he wanted. Perhaps he had mistaken the street; for presently he turned back and faced the Colonel, looking at him for a moment as they passed each other under a street lamp. "I beg your pardon," he said, stopping, and speaking in Italian, with the accent of one of the northern provinces, "could you direct me to the Via delle Botteghe Oscure? I'm a stranger, and have missed my way."

The Colonel directed him in a few words, and the other man, slightly touching his hat, went on his way.

"Ha!" said the Colonel to himself, "I don't know

you. Never saw you in my life before!" He had an extraordinary accurate and retentive memory for faces, which had often stood him in good stead. "No, no; I don't know you. But my nerve has gone to the devil. That start made me shake like an old crone with the palsy." And he growled and swore savagely under his breath. And before he proceeded far on his way, he stopped at a liquor shop and swallowed a dram. As he raised the glass to his lips his hand shook. And again he muttered a curse. "I must get out of this place, *coûte qui coûte*, or the black terror will get hold of me as it did in Varna. I'll settle this business of the old fool of an Englishman, and be off. My nerve—my nerve is gone to the devil!"

CHAPTER XV.

NINA GUARINI had told Beppe the same day all that had passed at the Palazzo Nasoni. The telling of the tale had cost her many pangs. Every word was like a rough touch upon a half-closed wound. And yet she felt herself drawn nearer to Beppe by all the memories of the stormy past that were evoked as they spoke together. She thought of his faithful goodness to her in those dreadful days. And as she thought, there came back to her the old feeling of horror which used to overwhelm her in Paris at Laszinski's approach; and she shuddered from head to foot, and pressed closer to Beppe like a frightened child.

"You are feeling the reaction," said Beppe, gently. "You were brave enough to his face, Nina."

"Brave? I don't know. I was furious. I certainly had no fear of him in hot blood."

"You need have no fear of him at any time. He cannot hurt us."

"His very existence hurts me. I feel as if I knew that a wild beast had got loose from his cage, and I might come on him at any moment. And yet nothing is more sure than that he had some fear of me. Half drunk as he was, he winced every time I mentioned his real name."

"A man who is so well acquainted with the inside of the prison and the *bagne* may have good reasons for that," answered Beppe, carelessly; but he looked thoughtful.

"And why did he conceal his existence from us for so long? Even as it was, he did not wish to be recognized. He spoke of Laszinski as being alive, but far away,—in Croatia."

"Who knows why? Who knows?" said Guarini, abstractedly. But the shadow on his face grew very deep, and he remained silent for a long time, pondering intently.

"Listen, Nina," he said at length. "It is clear that this wild beast's claws are pared, or he would have attacked us long ago, and made all Rome ring with his story. No one knows it here, except you and me."

"And Max."

"Prince Massimo will hold his tongue for divers good reasons."

"That wretch has spoken evil of me to Masi, and——"

"What of that? If Masi is capable of being moved against his best friend by the words of such a one as——"

"It is not Masi's opinion that troubles me. I am sorry if he thinks ill of me; but it does not go deep. But I am grieved, Beppe, grieved to the heart about Violet. You don't know—I have never been able to speak of it—but I first took an affection for this English girl because she reminded me of my Marie."

Beppe gently stroked the rich black tresses of her bowed head.

"And I had a sort of superstitious fancy that I was doing something for Marie's memory—she who was so sweet and helpful to every one!—by being kind to the girl. And then she twined herself round my heart, and I came to love her for her own sake. And I was sorry for her, and that made me love her more. I, who have no sister, no daughter, no woman friend, I felt it sweet to have the affection of this innocent girl."

Again Beppe lightly stroked her hair in silence. Nina was so little apt to speak of her own feelings that this womanly strain of tenderness in her moved him with a sort of surprise. He thought it a weakness; but he loved her the better for it.

At the bottom of his heart he was more disquieted by this astonishing resuscitation of Laszinski than he had cared to show Nina. He had had none of the haunting doubts as to the man's death which had troubled her; and the shock of this discovery was proportionately great. And then, although he had declared that Laszinski could not hurt them, or he would already have done so, yet the fact that Laszinski was living, and walking about in the same city with himself, made the world different for Beppe Guarini. Let him be as great a villain as he might, Casimir Laszinski was Nina's husband by a tie which neither the laws of Austria nor Italy could break. All the rest of the day Beppe was taciturn and thoughtful. He gave a little nervous glance at the door every time it was opened, and looked mistrustfully and anxiously at each of the numerous letters which he received in the course of his business. He had a long colloquy with Jules Bonnet, who was in Rome on a brief visit, the scope of which was connected with the political propaganda of Socialistic doctrines. Once Nina, going suddenly into the study where the two men were talking together, heard Jules Bonnet say, "He was marked as a traitor years ago; and if the Russians in Geneva were once sure——" But seeing her, he broke off and changed his discourse.

Nina, for her part, was anxious for some news of Violet. And knowing how absolute was the "Yea, yea," and "Nay, nay," of the "little Puritan" as she called her, and that she would never consent to deceive Mario by holding any secret communication with her friend, Nina bethought her of sending for Kitty Low.

Kitty's account of her young mistress was sad enough. "She cries all day when she's by herself, or with me alone. And she only makes a little pretence of cheering up for her aunt's sake, or when Mr. Chester comes in. Ah, he's a very fine sort of a young man, is Mr. Chester. I wish she could have chosen him instead of that Captain!"

"Poor Captain!"

"Oh, he's fond of her in his way, Signora. But it's but a poor kind of way when all's said and done. I never was in love myself, and it ain't very likely as any one will ever be in love with me. So perhaps, you'll say I've no right to speak. But I do think there's a deal of false boasting goes on about 'love' after the Captain's fashion. A sweet pretty young creature takes his fancy, and he wants to have her for his own. And his vanity is tickled—and well it may!—by her being devoted to him. And the world is to leave off minding its own business to take an interest in him, and say

what a fine thing it all is! What is it but selfishness? *I* can't see as its anything else. For, remember, he's not to be expected to make any sacrifices, nor hear any reason, nor put his pride in his pocket, nor listen to any advice as goes against the grain! Oh, no!"

"Men don't love as we do, Kitty."

"Oh, I don't say it's only the men. There's plenty of selfishness among women. But all men ain't the same. There's differences, thanks be! Now Mr. Chester is different."

"And do you think that Mr. Chester loves Violet?"

"Yes, I do;—what *I* call loving. He puts hisself on one side, does Mr. Chester, and understands that there's something due to other folks, and that Number One, though it may be a very interesting number, don't *quite* fill up the whole of the heavens and the earth!"

"You are hard on the Captain, Kitty."

"Am I, Signora?" Then after a pause of reflection, "Well, perhaps I am. It ain't fair to expect grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles. And it ain't altogether his fault, if poor Miss Violet has dressed him out in her fancy with all sorts of fine feathers that don't belong to him."

"Ah! She's not the first woman who has done that, my good Kitty."

"Why, no; more's the pity! After all, I suppose the Lord has ordained it so, and we must have faith that it's for the best. And to be sure if men and women saw each other as they really are, there'd be a sight fewer marriages. I doubt we should have no need for the emigration societies."

Then Nina asked if Violet spoke of her, and was answered that she did, and always with affection. "It's very hard on her," said Kitty Low, "this freak the Captain has took to quarrel with you, Signora. And, perhaps, Miss Violet might have stood out against it if things had been going well with him; for she has spirit enough sometimes. But she says she won't add to his vexations just at this time. She'll wait with patience, and all that. Ah, dear me, when a man gets a woman to pity him, he has a tight hold on her! And it always seems to me one of the curiousest things in this curious world that women, who certainly don't have the best of it here below, are so ready to be sorry for them great, strong, masterful creatures directly the least little thing goes crooked with 'em. There's a mother's heart in most women, and a touch of the baby in most men; and may be *that's* the reason."

Nina dismissed Kitty Low with a great nosegay of rare flowers for Violet. "You need not say who it

comes from," she said. "Just set them in a vase on her table. She loves flowers."

"No need to say a word, Signora! She'll know well enough whose kind thought it was to send them,—poor dear."

The next morning Nina ordered the *coupé* and drove straight to the office of the *Tribune*, taking Pippo with her on the box. Arrived there, she sent up a pencilled word on a card: "If you are alone, I request you to see me." And in a few moments Pippo came back begging her to go upstairs.

She had scarcely entered the inner room when Masi, starting up, advanced to her with both hands held out. "Ah, Signora Nina, Signora Nina," he said, "there's no one like you in the world! I always said so, even when I did not know it so well as I do now."

Her quick eye noticed his haggard look; her quick ear observed the subdued tone of his voice, that had lost its old resonant *timbre*, and sounded like the voice of a person very weary. Any little lingering resentment or thought of reproaching him, was quenched in her breast. "Well, Masi, what has all this been about?" she said as cheerfully as she could. "I see I am forgiven at any rate."

"It is for me to beg forgiveness. I——"

"No, no, no; let it be! Don't let us waste our time with that sort of thing."

"I only learnt yesterday that those shares which were assigned to me——"

She stopped him. "Now, Masi, look here. Let us make a bargain. I have something to forgive. You made a mistake. Well, I'll forgive you on condition that you say not a word more, now or hereafter, about those wretched shares."

"But, Signora Nina, you cannot be allowed to crush people under such a weight of obligation without their uttering a word!"

"Nonsense about obligations! If you will hear the truth I did the little I could do, less for your sake than for Violet's; and less for her than for the sake of—some one whom you neither of you ever saw or heard of. So that is finished and done with. And now, tell me, when may I see Violet?"

"See Violet? Whenever you please, I suppose! Why do you ask me?"

"What! Have you forgotten that you laid your imperial commands on her to hold no communication with me?"

"I? Who says so?"

"She herself! She wrote me a little despairing note on the subject, all blotted with tears."

"No! Truly! Oh the silly child! I suppose I said something in a passion. I scarcely remember it, even."

"She remembered it. But have you not spoken to her on the subject since?"

"I have scarcely seen her since. Only once, for a few minutes. I have been so busy."

"*Poveretta!*"

"Yes, yes; *poveretta*, as much as you like, but I ask you, *Signora Nina mia*, if such holding one to the letter of every idle word is not childish,—and even wearisome?"

"H'm! Perhaps in time she may learn not to believe you."

"Violet has such overstrained notions. A kind of scrupulosity that hasn't common sense in it. Sometimes we don't seem to understand each other at all."

"*Sometimes!*" thought Nina. "No; you seldom understand one another." But she kept the thought to herself. Here was this poor girl, in her single-minded sincerity, sacrificing her own wishes to obey an idle word, spoken in anger, and already forgotten by the speaker. And here was Mario resenting her obedience as something overstrained,—almost affected. But what could be said? Any word from a third person would be certainly useless, and probably harmful.

Nina changed the subject, and began to warn Masi against the man who called himself Smith-Müller; telling him that she knew the man to be false and unscrupulous, and altogether evil.

"Oh," answered Masi carelessly, "he can do me no harm. I trust him no farther than I can see him. He is useful to me in a way. He picks up all sorts of information by some means or other. And with all his *blague* he's not a bad sort of fellow, poor devil. It's quite singular what a strong attachment he has to *me*."

"Masi, Masi, he has no more power of being sincerely attached to any one than Mephistopheles who clenches his cold devil's fist in the face of creation!"

Masi stared at her. He was not accustomed to hear anything so rhetorical and emphatic from her lips. A few weeks ago he would have been curious to discover the cause of her unusual emotion. But now a strange listlessness had come over him. His interest, his very faculties, seemed absorbed in the one subject of the newspaper. When Nina spoke of that, he listened and answered with something of his old vivacity. He showed her a series of articles in the *Messenger of Peace*—violent personal attacks on himself, thinly disguised. He was accused of dishonourable intrigues; of political dishonesty; of cynical disregard for his obligations towards his creditors.

"That's my dear friend Ciccio's doing," said he. "He has never forgiven the part the *Tribune* took in the affair of the Pontine Marshes. He was hit in a tender place—his pocket."

Nina tossed aside the papers with a scornful gesture. "Surely you do not let attacks like that trouble you?" she said. But it was clear that they did trouble him. His *amour propre* was still sensitive. Then, despite her rebuff on a former occasion, Nina set herself to persuade him to abandon journalism altogether. She tried scolding him in her old playful way; she tried coaxing; she tried hard, plain speaking; pointing out the futility of his struggle, and how manifestly it was his duty to the woman he had bound himself to marry, to accept his defeat, and make a new effort in some other direction. He listened in absolute silence, with the same quiet gentleness,—almost apathy,—which had struck Peretti. All at once Nina said, fixing her brilliant dark eyes on his, "Masi, what is your plan? I see you have one. You have made up your mind to do something in spite of us all! What is it?"

He laughed softly. "*Viva la Signora Nina!*" he said. "Of all the men I have talked with, not one of them has seen that. Yes; Nina *carissima;* you are right. I have a plan, and I mean to carry it out."

"May one know it?" she asked with a smile. But

the delicately gloved hand she laid on his sleeve had turned cold, and her voice was not steady.

"To-day,—let me see!—to-day is Thursday. You shall know on Saturday. It is not long to wait till Saturday."

"And you can't trust me,—not even me, with it before then?"

"I'm afraid not. No; I cannot tell you my plan now. But you shall know it on Saturday."

"Masi, will you lunch with me on Saturday?"

"No, *cara*. Not on Saturday. I cannot."

"Will you dine with me, then?"

"At what hour?"

"Half-past seven, as usual. I shall probably be alone. If you like, I will ask Violet."

"No, don't ask Violet."

"As you please. Will you come?"

"Well,—if my combination succeeds,—yes. But don't wait for me."

"But I *shall* wait for you! I allow no such loophole for leaving me in the lurch. If you are not punctual, my dinner will be spoiled, and my cook will be raving. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," he answered, with one of his old winning, frank smiles.

"I'm so glad we're friends, again, Masi!"

"Friends! When were we anything else? No, no, no; don't shake your head! I say I never was anything but your friend in my heart; and you know it in *your* heart,—not being a silly little Puritan, but a flesh-and-blood woman who knows the world and can make allowances!"

"Ah, *vaurien!* She is too good for you!"

"I don't say no. But people who are too good are very inconvenient!"

She looked at him reassured. There was a gleam of his old self in his words and his smile.

"You won't forget Saturday then?"

"No. I won't forget Saturday."

She held out her hand, which he pressed with a strong grip that hurt her. Then lightly holding her shoulders with his two hands, he bent down and kissed her forehead. "Good-bye, Nina," he said. "God bless you."

CHAPTER XVI.

"AND he 'did not mean it,' you say! But what, then, did he mean? What are words worth? Have they any value for him at all?"

Violet sat in the shabby sitting-room in her aunt's lodging, holding Nina's hand.

"Perhaps he did mean it, *then*. He was under a mistake. He was hot and angry. You see, *mon enfant*, these dear Southerns often think what they speak, instead of speaking what they think. The two things are different."

The tears stood in Violet's eyes. She thought of Nina's words, "You will expect from him what he cannot give, and what he will think you foolish for expecting."

Slowly, slowly, by painful degrees, resisted and fought against step by step, but ever victoriously advancing—helped by the candour and rectitude of her nature—the conviction had for some time past

been growing up in her mind that she had been blind and rash and wilful, and that her love had been a delusive dream. It was not that she said to herself "Mario will never make me happy;" but that she felt in her innermost heart that she could never, never be to *him* all that she had fondly hoped. Was she necessary to Mario's happiness? Was his life incomplete and lonely without her? Was not the larger part of it occupied with interests in which he did not expect or even wish her to share? Only a few days previously she had expressed her bitter regret that he had entered into the newspaper speculation for her sake; and he had answered, "*Che, che!* Don't take it into your head that you are responsible for that. I should have gone into something of the kind, sooner or later, if there had been no Violet Moore in the world!"

But even in her inmost thoughts she made gentle and generous allowances for him. Kitty Low had not spoken without reason when she said that if a man could induce a woman to pity him, he had a tight hold on her.

As Nina drove up to her own door after leaving Violet, she met William Chester coming away from it; and she made him return and enter the house with her. She told him of her interview with Masi, and

how she had just left Violet, and that they were all good friends again. "Dear Violet, you know, interpreted his words too much *au pied de la lettre.*"

Chester looked grave. "How else should one interpret a man's words, on so serious a subject as breaking with an old friend?" he said.

"Oh, yes, yes; I know all that!" answered Nina, a little impatiently. "With you, no doubt, it would be different. But Masi is of another temperament. One must take people as they are." Her intelligence and her conscience approved Chester. But there was more sympathy in her heart for Masi. And that sympathy was quickened and intensified now by the haunting fear of some impending disaster.

"I came to bid you farewell, Signora," said Chester, when they were seated in the study.

"Farewell!"

"Yes; I am going away from Rome. I have already lingered here longer than I at first intended."

"Going away! Oh, I am sorry! I am sorry for Violet."

Chester smiled half sadly, half bitterly. "I do not think there is any need for you to be sorry on her account," he said.

Nina felt that she had no right to say more, or to thrust herself into his confidence, and he was

evidently not to be moved out of his reserve by any sudden wave of emotion. After a short silence she said, "When do you go, Mr. Chester?"

"To-morrow. Or, possibly, if all my preparations are not completed, on Saturday morning."

"Oh, don't go so soon! Stay a day longer! Stay beyond Saturday!" she said, clasping her hands nervously.

"For what reason? To what end? I—I—perhaps I ought not to intrude my personal feelings on you, but I assure you there are reasons which make my stay in Rome very painful."

"I know them! I guess them. But pray do not go away so soon! If it is a sacrifice—I ask you to make it for Violet's sake!"

"My dear Signora, you are under some strange misapprehension. My staying here can be of no use or comfort to Violet just now. I have spoken with her about it. We are agreed. It sounds like an empty boast to say that if I could serve her by staying, I would stay. But I think she knows that it is so."

"Would it be so great an effort for you to put off your journey four-and-twenty hours?"

"No;—if there were any rational motive for it."

"Will you act, for once, on an irrational motive? Will you stay to oblige me?" She smiled at him,

and looked up half playfully. But under the gracefulness and ease of her manner there was a strange agitation, which made her lips quiver, and her hands press the brilliants on her fingers until they made red marks on the white skin.

"Oh, of course, if you really make a point of it! Why should I refuse? I am only too happy to accede to your request, only I must tell you frankly once more, if you think it will be of the least service to Violet, you are mistaken."

"No, no, not to Violet, to *me!* A quite irrational favour to me!"

He smiled in spite of himself. "You have been so kind and friendly and hospitable to us all, Signora, that it would be strange to refuse so small a request. And I am sure you have a reason that seems to you sufficient for making it."

"Thank you," she said, earnestly. "Thank you with all my heart!"

And Chester went away musing curiously on her insistence, and half ashamed of himself for having yielded to it without any convincing grounds.

That evening, when her *salon* was filled as usual by a crowd of men, Nina gathered round her a little knot of intimates, and spoke to them of Masi. Dr. Angeloni opined that there was no chance of anything

being effected by the Party for the assistance of the *Tribune of the People.* Silvotti was inclined to differ from him, and thought there were still hopes of a "combination." Giorgi, embittered more than ever by the failure of the Pontine Marshes Company, and the consequent overthrow of his hopes in connection with it, declared that the only way to succeed or make your way nowadays was to pay court to the Clericals and the reactionary party; and that it was sufficient for a man to be suspected of liberal and patriotic principles for him to be systematically neglected, if not actively persecuted.

"I wish you'd look after Masi a little during the next few days," said Nina. "I think we have all left him too much to himself. He gets morbid and dispirited."

"Dispirited!" echoed Carlo Silvotti, with a laugh. "That's not a word that belongs to Masi at all. He throws off troubles like water from a duck's back. He *won't* suffer, not he!"

"That's just what I'm afraid of," murmured Nina. And then she took Dr. Angeloni's arm, and walked aside with him, talking in a low and earnest voice.

Meanwhile the object of her solicitude was tranquilly eating his dinner at the *Café di Roma,* in company with Telemaco Bini, the fat Deputy with the small feet, whom we have seen at the Guarinis, and an ex-

Secretary of the Ministry of Grace and Justice. They were extremely cheerful, despite their holding most gloomy views respecting the internal and external policy of Italy, and uttering terrible prognostications of the impending ruin of their country. But this prospect has seldom been found to impair the appetite of professional politicians.

When they separated Masi asked Bini to walk down with him to the office. Bini had been an occasional *collaborateur* on the *Tribune* ever since its first establishment. As the two men strolled along the lighted streets, side by side, their talk was of renewing bills, of raising loans—of money, in a word, and nothing but money. A dishonoured bill of exchange did not appear to Telemaco Bini by any means so terrible a possibility as Masi seemed to think it. "*Per Bacco.* When one has done all one can, I don't see——! *I* had several bills protested after I had gone into that silk-growing affair in Lombardy."

"If you see your way to paying up eventually it may be different," admitted Masi.

The other man thoughtfully rubbed his nose. "Well," said he, "I have not quite seen my way to that, yet!"

As they entered the narrow dingy street where the newspaper office was situated, they saw a man slowly pacing along before them, who, when he came opposite

to the door of the office, being on the other side of the street, stopped and glanced upward at the windows, and then all along the pavement on each side of the way. In so doing he became aware of them, and, after looking at them carelessly for a moment, strolled on again at the same slow pace, and disappeared round the corner of the next turning.

"Our friend has chosen an odd place for a promenade," observed Bini.

"I noticed him here this morning. I suppose he's commissioned by some creditor to see that I don't carry off any of the valuable deal tables and rickety chairs which compose the choice furniture of the office," returned Masi with a laugh.

When they went upstairs, Bini sat down to sketch out an article, the purport of which had been agreed upon among them at dinner; the ex-Secretary having furnished some damaging details as to the administration of his successor, and the fat Deputy having favoured them with the contents of a private letter from an extraordinarily well-informed personage in Paris, which, if published, would infallibly shake the position of his Excellency the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs. Masi turned over a packet of correspondence arrived by that evening's post. "Ah!" he exclaimed, after reading one special letter, "the man charged with that affair

has obtained the promise of an interview from the person I told you of."

Bini raised his tragic eyebrows. "M——?" said he mysteriously.

"Yes; and the Director of the Bank does not seem unfavourably disposed."

"Bravo! Things are going well then?"

"Who can say? *Sarà quel che sarà!*" returned Masi with a slight shrug.

Then for a while there was nothing heard but the scratching of Bini's rapid pen and the rustling of paper. But before very long the silence was broken by louder sounds. A heavy foot came stamping up the stairs, and Colonel Smith-Müller burst into the room with his hat in one hand and a pocket-handkerchief in the other, with which he was wiping his face. "My dear Masi," he shouted, "I am exhausted,—exhausted. I have been rushing about on business, and not my own business either, all day. Ah, Bini *carissimo!* I want to speak to you by and by, my dear Masi."

Bini looked up with his serious stare. "Good evening, Colonel," he said. "I shall have finished directly. That is to say,—the article isn't quite done, Masi; but it's too late for to-morrow's paper now, at all events. I'll correct it, and put it into shape for Saturday. Meanwhile, if you and the Colonel have any private business——"

"No, nonsense; we have no secrets to talk of," answered Masi. But the Colonel made a grimace behind Bini's back, and signed to Masi to get rid of him. And then he began to walk up and down the room with ostentatious impatience. Bini, for his part, was never sorry to break off from work. He looked rather longingly at the inkstand and the abundant provision of writing paper, and muttered something about having one or two letters which he should have liked to get written then and there. But finally he rose from his chair, and went away. Then the Colonel began to exhibit still more marked symptoms of excitement and agitation. He puffed, and panted, and swore, and walked about, and sat down, and started up again, and mopped his face; and at length sent the errand-boy to a neighbouring liquor-shop to get him some of the concoction sold there under the name of *rhum*. Having had his dram, he braced himself to broach Mr. Higgins's proposition to Masi: watching the latter anxiously all the time, and ready to change his tone at the least hint to be gathered from his friend's countenance.

For some time Masi did not fully comprehend the proposal; the Colonel not thinking it prudent to blurt it out without preparation. "But what is it, then?" said Masi at length. "Does the old man coolly offer to pay me for giving up his niece? Is it *that?*"

His manner was so much more placid than the Colonel had expected, that the latter began to bluster. "Ha! I have sacrificed myself for my friend, according to my old foolish way. A pleasant task you may imagine it to be, to listen to that block-headed *épicier*, to waste my hours,—which are counted in Rome now,—to plead a losing cause! But no matter. Alexis Smith-Müller expects no gratitude. He is used to that."

"Did old Higgins commission you to make me that offer?"

"Old Higgins! Who is old Higgins? After all, who and what is old Higgins? A vulgar English shopkeeper! They are all shopkeepers at heart. And why should we be sensitive to *his* opinions? *Parbleu!* If he offers a handsome sum,—a sum which would float us for another quarter of a year,—why pay him the compliment of behaving with extreme delicacy? Delicacy is wasted on a fellow like that. He cannot understand it. He cannot rise to it. The sentiments of a chivalrous gentleman are unknown to old Higgins! Then why not get from him what he has to give, instead of expecting from him what he has not? Honour and a sense of delicacy?—*Point!* He has them not. Pounds sterling?—plenty! Let us take his pounds sterling! They are the only argu-

ments he understands. Let us accept them! It has ever been my rule to converse with the natives of a country in their own language, and according to their own customs. With a King of the Gold Coast, your negotiations are carried on in beads and *rhum;*—with an Englishman in pounds sterling. We are not children, *quoi!* We are men of the world, eh?"

He had begun his speech with a vapouring burst of indignation; as he carried it on, he had gradually cooled down into a semblance of putting the argument fairly; he had finished it by undisguisedly recommending Masi to take Mr. Higgins's bribe. And every word, every gesture, every inflection of his voice had carefully followed the indications which he was able to gather from watching Masi's face.

Masi remained singularly quiet. There was no fire of wrath in his countenance. No volcanic explosion appeared to be imminent. The Colonel, in undertaking this mission, had not concealed from himself that one—and by no means the remotest—possibility connected with it, was that Masi should fly into a violent rage, and kick him downstairs. But no; Masi remained passive, and listened without any outward symptoms of irritation. The Colonel was emboldened to hope for ultimate success. He would have mentally reviled Masi for a fool if he had peremptorily rejected

the proposition. But none the less did he mentally sneer and jeer at him for appearing to consider it. "Aha! Hunger tames tigers; and want of cash brings down bold Captains to a condition of wonderful meekness," thought he. "The way I've heard that fellow talk about honour and independence! Bah! A *blagueur*, like the rest!"

"Well, I think, Colonel," said Masi at length rather slowly, "I think I shall be able to oblige the good Uncle Higgins."

The Colonel became rampant in his triumph. He slapped his breast, he marched about, he tossed off the last remaining drops of rum. "Oblige him, my dear Masi? Bleed him! Let us see the colour of his pounds sterling. Ha, ha, ha! You shall make a fine bargain. *I* will arrange it for you,—I am an old negotiator, a wary fox, experienced in the secret service of my country! We are *vieilles moustaches Quoi!* We know how to make a treaty with the barbarous tribes. *Sacr-rre!*"

"Yes; I think I shall be able to oblige the old Uncle Higgins. But I don't mean him to pay me for it."

The Colonel stopped short in his triumphal march, and turned sharp round, staring at Masi as though some amazing phenomenon had struck him dumb.

"What?" he gasped at length. "You are joking —Masi! What do you mean?—*Mauvaise plaisanterie!* Ha! I swear you quite took me in, for a moment!" And the Colonel wiped his forehead, and glared at the other man with an expression half savage, half alarmed.

"Do you know, my friend," said Masi deliberately, "that you have had a very narrow escape?"

"Escape! Ha? What?" blustered the Colonel, "*Point de farces!* No more bad jokes, my beloved Masi! I am an old soldier and a man of honour."

"You have had an extraordinary narrow escape of having that cane of yours broken over your shoulders!"

The Colonel leaped backwards, and seized his cane, which was heavily loaded. He drew himself up to his full height, and confronted Masi. He was a tall powerful man; and though broken by dissipation, would still be no contemptible antagonist in a brief struggle. Masi sat like a rock, leaning with one elbow on the table, and looking at him steadily with his bright, handsome Southern eyes, as a man might look at a dangerous dog. And as he looked, all Nina's warnings against the fellow recurred to his mind. It seemed to him as if a mask had fallen from the Servian's face, and he saw the evil soul glaring at

him for the first time from those narrow cunning loopholes.

The position did not really last more than three seconds; but it seemed a much longer time to both the men. Smith-Müller at length moved, and the impression on Masi's mind was effaced, like reflections in water dispersed by a ripple. The Colonel lowered his arm that held the cane. If the negotiation with the old Englishman failed, he had small chance of getting wherewithal to leave Rome; and he was possessed with a longing to leave it. A nameless terror urged him to fly and hide himself. The thought that the existence of Casimir Laszinski was known to more than one person in the city filled him with tremors. He would make one last desperate effort to obtain some money from Mr. Higgins; and to that end it was necessary to be prompt. Masi must not see the old man first. He dropped his cane, as has been said; drew out his pocket-handkerchief, which he passed ostentatiously across his eyes, slapped his breast two or three times, and said in a broken voice: "I have endured much. Ingratitude is familiar to me. But insult I have never brooked until to-day. Friendship weakens a man. It has weakened me. It has made me contemptible in my own eyes. Had any other being in Rome spoken those words to me, his blood

would have flowed like water. But you, Mario Masi, have presumed upon the affection of a comrade,—an old soldier,—and a man of honour. Enough. I shall be at my lodgings all to-morrow, and if you need me you know where to find me."

And with that he went away.

CHAPTER XVII.

In compliance with the Signora Nina's request the three men with whom she had spoken agreed to keep a watch on Masi, and distract his mind, if possible, from brooding on gloomy thoughts. Silvotti did not much believe in the necessity of any such distraction. Who had ever seen Mario Masi out of spirits? It was his creed to dismiss unpleasant considerations from his mind, and he acted on it.

In fact when they made an excuse connected with the business of the newspaper to call on him the following day (Friday) at the office, Masi certainly showed no symptoms of melancholy. It had become known to the more intimate circle of those who frequented Casa Guarini that Masi was betrothed to the pretty English girl whom they all liked. And it was generally imagined that she would have a good dowry. Not that this had ever been stated—or even hinted—by any one likely to be well informed; but she was known to have a rich uncle. And, besides, money was considered to

be almost as inevitable an appurtenance to English people as their accent. Bini and one or two of the set thought there was no fear of Masi falling into despondency with the prospect of a good marriage to help him out; but others remarked that Masi had a peculiarly sensitive pride and independence in money matters, and that if he could bring nothing in the shape of an equivalent for the bride's fortune to the common stock, the projected marriage might evaporate into air altogether.

Dr. Angeloni was peculiarly beloved and respected by his own party, and considerably feared and respected by his political adversaries. He was a man who could take it on himself to cross-examine Masi as to the prospects of the *Tribune*, without fear of being deemed impertinently meddlesome. Masi answered him quite frankly up to a certain point. Then at length he said lightly, "Who knows how things will go? There is one chance,—a combination, which I am now negotiating, and which may succeed. If that fails——"

"You will suspend the publication of the journal?"

"*Suspend* it? Well, yes; if you like to put it so,—as one may call death a suspension of breathing!" And Masi laughed as he said it.

The four men (Giorgi and Silvotti being of the party) sat smoking and chatting in the dingy office which was

the editor's private sanctum. The outer office was larger. The two rooms did not communicate with each other directly, but were separated by a landing of the common staircase. The party talked of all sorts of subjects, except the *Tribune of the People*. After the few words exchanged between Dr. Angeloni and Masi, the newspaper was not mentioned among them. Presently Masi said he had one or two letters to write which must be ready by to-morrow; and he would profit by that half-hour of leisure to get them off his mind. Silvotti lounged on a bench. Angeloni was installed in the one easy-chair. Old Giorgi sat at the rickety table, around which Colonel Smith-Müller, and Chester, and Masi had been gathered on the occasion of the proposition respecting the rifles for Greece. Giorgi was reading the newspapers of the day, a pile of which, of all political colours, lay at his elbow. And opposite to him sat Masi, who, with a cigar between his teeth, was steadily covering sheet after sheet of note paper.

"Come," said Angeloni, looking at his watch; "shall we dine together? Let us go to the Falcone, and have a dinner *alla Romana!* I haven't done that for a year and more. Come, let us drink to the success of the *Tribune* in a pint of *Vino dei Castelli!*" *

* Wine grown in the neighbourhood of Rome, at Genzano Marino, Velletri, and other places.

"Yes, directly; when I've done," muttered Masi indistinctly, still holding the cigar between his teeth.

"Your cigar is gone out," observed Silvotti.

"Has it? So it has. I never can keep a weed alight whilst I'm writing. It's prophetic, you see, of what Angeloni calls the *suspension* of the *Tribune!*" said Masi, writing the addresses on some envelopes.

"It only wants a good puff or two, my dear fellow."

"The *Tribune?*"

"No; the cigar."

They all laughed; and Masi, rising from the table, flung the letters he had written into a drawer, and declared himself ready.

"I say, Masi, you are becoming a formidable rival to Telemaco Bini," cried Silvotti, as he led the way downstairs.

"As how?"

"By developing a new gift of letter-writing."

"Ah! You see when an affair has to be wound up, and is approaching the end, there are always one or two epistolary matters to settle," answered Masi. Then he went back a few steps, missing Giorgi, who had lingered behind, and calling to him to come. The old man limped out of the office after the rest, and they all proceeded to dine together at the well-known restaurant which Dr. Angeloni had suggested.

It has been recorded that Giorgi was a *gourmand;* and of all the party he would ordinarily have been the one most keenly to enjoy the dinner and the good wine set before them. But this evening he was absent in his manner and seemed to eat and drink without knowing what he was swallowing. Before they broke up, Dr. Angeloni drank to the success of the *Tribune.* And then Silvotti declared that he also had a toast to propose. As they were there in *petit comité,* all friends and colleagues, he hoped Masi would allow him to drink to a fair and amiable young lady whom they all knew and respected, *la Signorina Violetta!* And to her name he would add that of——

"Don't add any name," interrupted Masi, laying his hand on the other man's arm.

"I thought," said Silvotti, looking at him in surprise, "that it was permissible to make a *brindisi* to the *sposi.*"

"There are no *sposi* in the case. The young lady in question, whom we all honour and admire" (here there was a warm murmur of assent from all), is, "to the best of my belief, perfectly free. I drink her health with all my heart."

He stood up, emptied his glass, and threw it on the ground, breaking it into a hundred fragments. There was silence for a second or two. Then Masi said gaily,

"The goblet shall never be used to celebrate a less worthy toast. And now I must pay the waiter, who probably won't see the romance of the thing, *gratis!*"

Whilst the bill was being paid, Giorgi drew Dr. Angeloni aside, and whispered to him hurriedly, "I wanted to tell you;—I fancy—I cannot help fancying, —that one of those letters which Masi was writing at the office was directed to me."

"To you?"

"Yes. I only caught a glimpse of the cover; but I think it is so. Now why should he write a letter to me sitting there opposite to him? I don't like the look of it."

Neither did Angeloni like the look of it. But there was no time to discuss the matter further.

"Where are you going now, Masi?" asked Angeloni as they left the restaurant. Masi said he was going to the printing-office, which was some distance from the editor's office of the *Tribune*. At a sign from Angeloni, Silvotti offered to walk with Masi to the printing-office, an offer which was accepted without difficulty. And before they separated Angeloni said, "I shall look you up to-morrow, Masi, about that new contributor who wants to write for the *Tribune*. I'm not sure that I'm doing my duty by the *Star of*

Progress in letting you have such a capital article instead of securing it for ourselves, but——"

"Oh, my dear Doctor, I quite understand. The new contributor is too moderate for you! The *Tribune* does admit an occasional shade of rose-colour. But for you—oh, uncompromising Cato of the Extreme Left!—there must be no tint but the purest and most unadulterated scarlet."

So they parted with a jest, and an appointment to meet on the morrow.

The next day, Saturday, Silvotti was at the *Tribune* office early, but Masi had not yet appeared there. The errand boy, lounging on a stool in the outer office, announced that the *Signor Capitano* (for so he was still styled among them) had taken away with him the key of the editor's room last night; he (the boy) did not know why. After about half an hour Masi came in. He was paler than usual, but otherwise unchanged. And when Silvotti observed that he looked fagged, he answered that he was tired.

"I don't think I ever heard you say that you were tired before, in all the time I have known you!" said Silvotti.

"If I had felt tired I should have said so," replied Masi, simply. And it was doubtless true. There was nothing of the Stoic about him.

"Well?" said Silvotti, "and the combination?"

"Failed. I had a letter at my lodging this morning."

"And the paper?"

"To-day's is the last issue. I have given orders at the printing-office."

Silvotti was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Well, *caro Masi*, I am sorry. And yet in one sense it is better that the thing should be settled, and you free from anxiety. It is over now."

"Yes; it is over."

"I expect Angeloni here by and by. You know he said he would come to speak about that contributor."

"Poor contributor!" said Masi, with a laugh. "His hopes of fame from the columns of the *Tribune* are extinguished. Here is the very last number of that journal which will ever illuminate the darkness of the Right, or the ignorance of the Ministry," he added, taking up that morning's paper, still damp from the press.

"Oh, I don't despair of seeing it rise again from its ashes," said Silvotti, smiling.

Masi took a key from his pocket. "I carried this away with me last night," he said, "because there are some papers in my private office that I did not wish pryed into." Then he put the morning's *Tribune* into Silvotti's hand, and left the room. He turned back

for a moment to say, "When Angeloni comes send him into the private office, will you?"

"All right," answered Silvotti, nodding with his eyes fixed on the newspaper he held in his hand.

In a little while old Giorgi's limping step was heard in the ante-room, and he came in. And his first inquiry as he glanced anxiously round the room was "Where's Masi?"

"In his office," replied Silvotti. "I fancy he is destroying some private papers that he would not like to fall into the wrong hands."

Giorgi sat down and wiped the perspiration from his bald head. "How does he seem?" he asked.

"Quite cheerful. I think he is really relieved to know that the worst is over."

They sat without speaking for a few minutes. Then Silvotti said, "Listen! He has shut the door of his room. I heard it clap to."

"I've a good mind to go in," said Giorgi.

"Perhaps it is better not. He told me to send Angeloni to him as soon as he should arrive."

"I wish Angeloni would come!"

"Here he is!" cried Silvotti, as the thin, aristocratic face of the Republican doctor appeared in the doorway.

When Angeloni heard the message left for him by Masi, he said he would go and speak with him

at once. He crossed the landing which divided the editor's room from that in which they were; but in half a minute returned saying, "He has fastened the door inside."

The three men looked at each other, and then Silvotti bounded across the landing and threw himself against the door. It had not been locked inside, but a fold of the matting which covered the floor had impeded its opening.

Mario Masi sat in the editorial easy-chair. His head, supported against the back of it, was inclined to one side; his right hand hung down with a revolver still grasped in it; a stream of blood trickled from his right ear.

"My God!" cried Giorgi, "that noise we heard when we fancied the door had clapped to——!"

Angeloni, with his professional coolness and promptitude, went up to the easy-chair, motioning the others back with his hand. After a few seconds he turned round.

"He is quite dead," he said. "And death must have been instantaneous. He did not suffer."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE letters written by Masi on the previous evening were found in the drawer where he had flung them. There was one to his old uncle, Don Gennaro, the country priest, far away in the Abruzzi. Another was to a political personage, who had been the medium of carrying on various negotiations with the object of supporting the newspaper. A third envelope was addressed to Giorgi. The old man's eyes had not deceived him. Masi had coolly written to him his last instructions, sitting there face to face. The envelope contained also another and far bulkier letter to Nina Guarini, which must have been written previously. The letter to Giorgi was as follows:

"DEAR GIORGI,—

"I entrust to you the task of telling the news of my death to the Signora Nina. Do not, if you can help it, let her hear it in any other way. When you have prepared her, give her the enclosed

letter. All my papers in the office are open. I have no business secrets. Forgive me for imposing this trouble on you, and impute it to my confidence in your sense and courage and fidelity. Thanks for all. My greetings to Angeloni, Silvotti, Bini, and all friends. Farewell.

"MARIO MASI."

The letter to Nina Guarini ran thus:

"DEAREST AND BEST FRIEND,—

"It is better so. You, who know me thoroughly, will think so before long. If there had been any immediate chance of a war, I might have waited and volunteered into the ranks, for the hope of giving—or taking—a few hard knocks before the end. But that does not seem to be coming just yet. Everything looks very tiresome. It is better to finish it. I told you long ago that when I gave up the *Tribune* I should give up a great many other things at the same time. At all events I fall at my post. When a man pays his life, his creditors can expect no more. You know, dear Nina, that it would not have suited me to endure a long struggle with troubles. I should most certainly have ended it sooner or later, and it is better to leave Violet free than a widow. You were right about all that. You are always right. It was a foolish fancy, and would never have answered for life. She will be far happier without me. Not just at first, but some day. I wrote her a letter

last night, saying that I was about to start on a long journey, and that I released her from her engagement. It may serve to prepare her for the truth.

"Now I want you, my dear friend, to relieve Violet's mind from any remorse of conscience. There is not the slightest real ground for her to feel any; but you know what she is, my poor little Puritan! Tell her that everything was done for me that could be done. And, if you think well, show her the enclosed. I answered it by post. It is a handsome offer; and she will see that I did not come to the end for want of help. But you know I would never have accepted money which there was no chance of repaying. If the combination with M. could have been effected, good! If not, not.

"And, after all, how much better to drop the curtain and put out the lights when the best of the play is over! The best is over for me. It has been a very good play, and I have enjoyed it. Don't be sorry, dear Nina. Good night.

"Your most affectionate

"MARIO."

The note alluded to, which was enclosed in the letter, was from William Chester. It contained an offer, couched in a few simple phrases, to assist Captain Masi with a loan, if he thought such assistance would be of solid and permanent use to him. Chester wrote: "As a relative of the lady whom

you are engaged to marry, and in whose happiness I am much interested, I have thought myself justified in making this proposition, which, from a stranger, might appear to be merely an unsolicited intrusion into your affairs."

The manner of this note was formal and business-like; but its purport moved Nina Guarini more than the finest phrases could have done. She knew, as Masi had not known or guessed, what a noble self-forgetfulness, what a generous sacrifice of feeling, were represented by those simple words. She was sensible of this even in the first shock of reading Masi's letter, after Giorgi had brought her the news of what had happened. In truth, there had been little room for preparation. The first glimpse of the old man's face announced calamity. And it was not many minutes before she had guessed the worst. "Tell me it all," she said. "Spare nothing." And Giorgi narrated in detail all the events of last evening and of that morning: the writing of the letters, the dinner at the Falcone, the toast, the final terrible scene in the office. Angeloni had been there, and his presence was a guarantee that nothing had been neglected. But it was all over. There had been no struggle, no suffering. Masi had proceeded with the coolest deliberation, and had even taken measures that the

noise of the shot should be deadened, by his way of putting the revolver to his ear; so that, in fact, nothing had been heard but a dull, faint shock, which they had taken for the shutting of a door. Giorgi told it all clearly and unflinchingly. And now, he said, they must think of the living. Nina felt that she had never done justice to the old man's strength of character. The truth was, he rose to the occasion, with a curious pride in Masi's having relied on him. His usual querulous sharpness had disappeared. He was gentle, helpful, and prompt.

"To you," said Nina, "I confide the care of keeping this from our poor girl. She must not know it roughly or suddenly. She must not know it at all for some time to come. Thank God, Mario wrote that letter to her, saying that he was going away. It gives us time. Go to the aunt. Keep watch and ward. Don't leave the house. Don't let a newspaper find its way to Violet. I will come to her when I can command myself, and be sure that my face will not betray me. Meanwhile there is one person among them all who can be trusted: Kitty, the servant maid. Tell *her* everything. You may rely on her sense and devotion. Take my carriage. It is waiting at the door for Beppe. I will explain to him."

The necessity for action nerved Nina to throw off

that prostration which follows a great shock. "I can cry afterwards," she said to herself. "It is always time enough for that." One of her first thoughts was to send for Chester. On him she chiefly relied to sustain Violet. He had proved what a warm and noble heart beat under that quiet undemonstrative exterior. Also she would take his advice about telling Mr. Higgins this news. He lodged, as will be remembered, in the same house with the Higginses; and Nina begged her husband to go himself, and bring Chester back with him.

It was still early in the forenoon, and Beppe found the young Englishman within. He was in his bedroom, with an open portmanteau on the floor, and piles of clothes scattered on the bed and on chairs, ready to be packed up. Beppe, in a few hurried words, told him that the Signora Nina begged him to go to her at once. Something dreadful had happened to poor Masi. He would hear all about it from the Signora. There was a cab waiting at the door. He was implored not to delay. Chester had seized his hat, and was half way downstairs before the words were well spoken.

"Something happened to Masi?" he said, looking at the other man's agitated face when they were in the cab. "But what—? How—? I have a letter

from him in my pocket which came by the early post this morning! He was quite well then."

But Beppe retired behind his pocket-handkerchief, weeping in the most unaffected manner, and left all further explanation to his wife. He had the ready Italian sympathy with disaster, and the ready Italian willingness to show it. And neither were at all checked by the manner of Masi's sudden end. No thought of blame,—no sense even of awe at this violent deed,—crossed the mind of any of Masi's friends for an instant. It was most terrible and tragic to think of his having been driven to destroy himself; but the horror did not reach beyond.

The sight of Nina's white, tearless face startled Chester more than her husband's expressions of grief had done; and the news she had to tell shocked him unspeakably. And he was not only shocked; he was bewildered. He did not comprehend it. Things could not, surely, have been so desperate as to drive Masi to this frightful resolution. Assistance he knew had been proffered——. "Yes," interrupted Nina; "most generously proffered. I have seen your noble letter." How, then, could it have been? What could have been the terrible prospect before Masi which rendered such a hideous alternative preferable?

How much more hideous that alternative appeared

to Chester's mind than it had seemed to Masi's, Nina did not fully know. But she in a great measure divined it. "And then," continued Chester, "to leave Violet! To abandon the poor, loving girl in this slough of misery, instead of staying to shield and spare her! Was not that aim enough to make a man cling to life?"

"Well, well," said Nina, in a dry choking voice, "he is past our help, or our sympathy, or our blame, poor fellow! Let us, as Giorgi wisely and bravely said, now think of the living."

Then she told Chester of the means she had taken to keep the news from Violet for the present. She was sure that Giorgi would not abandon his post. He would watch over the girl faithfully, and so would Kitty Low. But Violet would need better comfort than either of these could give her. "The poor child will be in grief enough as it is," said Nina, "at the thought of his going away. It was a blessed inspiration of Mario's to write to her in that sense. Violet's good angel must have put it into his head. It accounts for her not seeing him. It accounts for so much!"

"The first thing we ought to do," said Chester after a brief pause of anxious consideration, "is to get her out of Rome."

"You are right! You are thoroughly right!"

answered Nina, eagerly. "But how is it to be managed?"

Chester said that Mr. Higgins must be told the whole truth without delay. As for his wife, they must leave it to him to decide; but Chester was strongly of opinion that the only sure means of preventing her from blurting out a sudden word to Violet was to keep her in ignorance. "What she does not know she can't reveal," said Chester. "But in such a case as this I own I have small confidence either in Mrs. Higgins's head or heart." He undertook to tell Mr. Higgins, and no time must be lost. Every day, every hour, that Violet remained in Rome now was dangerous. She would probably offer no opposition to being taken away, now that she believed Mario was no longer there. Nina promised him to remain at home until the evening. Violet would probably hasten to her friend with the news contained in Mario's letter. If she did not, Nina would go to her after dusk. And then William Chester hurried away to perform the task he had undertaken.

A few paces from the door of the boarding-house, he came upon Colonel Smith-Müller, who was just leaving it. The fellow had a strange air on him, compounded of triumph and apprehension. There was a smile of victorious cunning on his face, and he

swaggered, and shouldered the passers-by with bullying insolence. But his restless eyes glanced furtively from side to side of the street, and occasionally he turned his head to glance over his shoulder. He walked more quickly than was his habit, too; and he kept one hand thrust into the breast of his coat, which was buttoned up to the chin. He became aware of Chester while the latter was still at some distance from him, and seemed anxious to avoid him. But being compelled to pass close to him, he lifted his hat with a mocking flourish and a boastful laugh, which sickened Chester. The Englishman was assailed by a sudden fear lest Smith-Müller should have anticipated his errand to Mr. Higgins. But as he mounted the stairs he said to himself, "No, it is impossible that even that ruffian could be publicly swaggering and grinning at this moment if he knew what had happened. He cannot have heard it yet." But the incident brought home to him more forcibly than ever that no time must be lost in revealing it to Mr. Higgins. Chester sent a message begging Mr. Higgins to come to him in his room. And before many minutes had elapsed Uncle Joshua appeared there.

Before Chester could speak, the old man began, "Well, I have succeeded! I have succeeded! I told you I had a plan. A man that has seen as much

of the world as I have was not likely not to get his own way in such a matter. It has been a pretty expensive job first and last. But I don't mind a score of pounds more or less, when I know the object is a wise one, and a just one, and calculated for the good of my family."

Whilst Chester was considering in what form of words to communicate that which he had to tell, and paying not much heed to the other's speech, Mr. Higgins suddenly spread out before him on the bed a paper bearing the signature of Mario Masi.

Chester started back at the unexpected sight of that name. "What is this?" he cried.

"You can see what it is," returned Mr. Higgins. "It is an undertaking to release my niece Violet from her engagement, in consideration of a sum of money paid over by me to Captain Marsy for that purpose. It ain't many uncles, let alone great-uncles, that would do as much. But that is my character. And besides, the child is a good child, and if she has been wrong it has been from inexperience and the natural weakness of the female mind when left to itself. She is free now, and some day she will thank me for it."

"She is free, indeed," answered Chester, in a low voice. "But her freedom has come in a very strange and terrible manner—by death—by a sudden and

violent death." Then laying his hand on the old man's arm, he said gently, "You have strength of character to bear a great shock. Masi is no more. He shot himself this morning."

"Merciful Lord!" exclaimed Uncle Joshua, falling back into a chair. But after a second or two he started up again, crying, "But it is impossible,—impossible! There is some error. He sent me this paper not half-an-hour ago. The ink was scarcely dry. Why you must have met the man who brought it. He hadn't left me five minutes before you sent for me."

"Was it *he* who brought it?" Chester seized the paper and examined it carefully. It was a clumsy forgery. Masi's writing had been imitated very roughly, either from carelessness or want of skill; and the style of the phraseology was unlike his. But this Mr. Higgins had not been able to detect. The bad English seemed to him quite natural. Struck by a sudden idea, Chester demanded if Smith-Müller had received any money.

"To be sure! He was empowered by Marsy to manage the affair. I paid him just now. Here's his receipt as well as Marsy's."

At another moment Chester's burning indignation at this piece of audacious villainy would have conquered every other consideration, and he would have bent all

his energies to have it exposed and punished. But now he must think first of Violet.

With all the circumstantial details that had reached him he narrated the events of that morning to Mr. Higgins; and succeeded in convincing him of their truth, and in bringing him to see that it was all-important to get Violet out of Rome without delay. The old man, although greatly shocked and agitated, did not lose his presence of mind. He at once declared that they must all set off by the first train which left Rome for Turin, and thence they would make what speed they could to France and England. He entrusted Chester with full powers to make all the necessary arrangements. It was agreed that Mrs. Higgins should not be told for the present of Masi's death; but merely that he had left Rome and given up his engagement to Violet. When Chester asked whether it would be possible to induce Mrs. Higgins to start by the mail train which left Rome that night for the North, Uncle Joshua answered with all his accustomed authoritative promptitude. Mrs. Higgins understood perfectly well, he said, that his orders must be carried out; and, inasmuch as he never issued any commands which were not perfectly judicious and calculated for the welfare of his family, it was only reasonable for him to exact unhesitating obedience.

It was not, however, found so easy to carry out this clear and simple theory with Mrs. Joshua Higgins. When she was told that she must leave Rome that night on her way back to England, she did not, indeed, openly rebel, but she opposed a passive resistance to all efforts to induce her to hasten; and she sat tearfully inert on the sofa in their sitting-room without stirring a finger to assist in the preparations.

"My packing!" she moaned, looking up plaintively at William Chester. "I am willing to sacrifice myself for Mr. Higgins's family,—the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. I am bodily unequal to the task of cramming my lilac satin—at sixteen and sixpence a yard, Mr. Chester—into the trunk like hay. And how can the packing be done properly between now and ten o'clock to-night? And why should we fly from Rome like malefactors if that extremely dishonourable and immoral Captain Masi *has* jilted Violet?"

"Woman!" cried her husband sternly, "do not mention the unfortunate man's name in that tone." And then fearing to betray more than he wished her to know, he walked out of the room, leaving Chester to listen to her lamentations. At length in despair Chester bethought himself of suggesting that Kitty Low should be sent for to assist Mrs. Higgins, and set off himself to fetch her at once.

His heart beat violently as he approached Miss Baines's dwelling. Kitty herself opened the door to him, and a glance at her face showed him that she knew all. Violet was gone to the Signora Guarini under the escort of the faithful Giorgi. He had not left her for a moment, and Kitty declared that his tact, patience, and devotion were more than she could describe or could have believed.

"And Violet? how does she bear it? What does she think? She does not suspect——?"

No. Kitty was sure that she did not suspect the worst. But she was sadly prostrated;—almost like one stunned. "And," said the woman, "it is pitiful to see the struggle in her mind not to be angry or resentful against him. But she feels it is hard and unjust to be left like that; so sudden, without a word of warning, no sacrifice made to face troubles for her sake. Of course if she knew that he was gone from this world for evermore, there wouldn't be anything in her heart but grief and pity. And yet, Mr. Chester, truth is truth, and justice is justice for the dead as well as the living. We are taught to forgive trespasses as we hope to be forgiven. But we're not taught to say there *are* no trespasses, nor yet to mash up right and wrong together so as no one can tell one from t'other. I always think it's cruel unfair to the folks as do resist temptation and stick to their

post like good soldiers of the Lord until He gives 'em leave to rest,—I do think it unfair not to hold them higher than self-seekers that just desert when things go against their will, and leave the rest of the world to fight it out."

That same night three men were watching in the office of the *Tribune of the People.* In the inner room tall tapers burned on either side of a table covered with black cloth, on which was stretched a motionless figure with a calm pale face. Wreaths of flowers were scattered over the black draperies; and the bier with its serene solemn burthen, and the fragrant flowers, and the clear motionless flame of the tapers, made a strange dissonance on that vulgar background of smart flimsy upholstery, and the squalid litter of dust and torn paper, and cigar ashes and splashes of ink, which strewed the floor. Silence and stillness were in the room. No breeze made the clear flame of the tapers quiver; no breath raised the quiet breast upon the bier. In the outer room Silvotti, Giorgi, and Dr. Angeloni kept mournful watch. All at once the door opened and a woman came in. They rose in surprise, but she raised her hand signing to them to be silent, and beckoning Giorgi, motioned him to lead her across the landing, and to open the door of the chamber of death

beyond. It was Nina Guarini. She advanced steadily to the bier and laid a handful of fresh white flowers on it. Then she took from her purse a lock of bright brown hair which she had cut from Violet's head an hour ago, and fastened it on the unconscious breast with a light firm hand. She bent and touched the marble forehead with her lips; and then knelt down and whispered a prayer she used to murmur at her mother's knee with little Marie's baby-hand clasped in hers, and little Marie's baby-voice lisping the words after her.

At the same moment the rushing train was speeding northward like a phantom through the glimmering darkness of the sad Campagna; cutting lives asunder like a sword of Destiny; bearing a freight of human creatures with hopes, and fears, and joys, and sorrows, and keen anticipations, and dull apathies, towards the unknown bourne from whence the silent traveller, so still near Nina's supplicating hands, would return nevermore.

CHAPTER XIX.

PRINCE MASSIMO NASONI had found it by no means easy to recover from the shock of the scene he had gone through with Laszinski. He considered himself to be an injured victim, with deep cause for murmuring against Fate. He found himself mixed up with a painful story of bigamy, his house besieged by a dangerous ruffian, and himself made the unwilling recipient of that ruffian's secret.

The annoyance to which he had been exposed, his terror lest a scandal should explode with which his name must be unavoidably connected, and the sense of being surrounded on all sides by disagreeable possibilities had an odd effect on his sentiments towards Nina; and embittered them by a subtle change like a chemical transformation. Why had she gone through that ecclesiastical ceremony of marriage with Guarini, whilst (as she herself had confessed) the suspicion lurked in her mind that Laszinski might still be among

the living? It is a fact that Laszinski's warning to mistrust a woman who had no religion had not been utterly without effect on Massimo's mind. The unsatisfactory results of a minute attention to sundry external formalities on his own life and conduct by no means reconciled him to Nina's neglecting them. It was difficult, of course, to practise the cardinal virtues; but one might at least attend the ceremonies of the Church.

The Prince was in a chronic state of uneasiness and apprehension as to what might be Laszinski's next move. Could he have disposed of a large sum of money, he would willingly have given it to get Laszinski shipped off to the Antipodes. But he was almost destitute of ready money. If Laszinski, in default of a heavy bribe, should choose to gratify his rancour by filling Rome with a disgraceful scandal in which the noble name of Nasoni would play a prominent part, the result might possibly be to break off Don Ciccio's marriage, now definitely arranged. And although that might not have deeply wounded the Prince's paternal susceptibilities, yet he well knew that his son and his mother would make him suffer for it. He was in a continuous fever of anxiety. His rest was broken, and he rose unrefreshed every morning, to cast a gloomily scrutinizing glance at his mirror, and to register with

unspeakable bitterness of spirit the deepening lines on his brow and round his eyes. His only gleam of comfort came from the thought that Laszinski might possibly have come to some arrangement with Guarini to leave him and Nina unmolested for money. This Guarini—against whom the Prince nourished a singular grudging dislike although he had never spoken with him in his life—was said to be rich!

Massimo lived for some days shut up almost like a prisoner; dreading to go abroad into the streets, dreading to receive a visitor, dreading to look at a newspaper. He declared himself indisposed; and denied his door to his friends. And in fact he did feel feverish and unwell. He had attended some religious exercises held by a pious confraternity in the Nasoni chapel; and had a book of devotions placed within reach of his hand beside his couch. He did not read it; finding a novel of Monsieur Alexandre Dumas, Père, more calculated to raise his spirits in the depressed state of his nervous system. The Prince extremely objected to the modern realistic school of French fiction; declaring that he could not conceive how persons of condition and refinement were able to endure the company of that revolting *canaille* which Monsieur Zola portrays with such wonderful, such terrific, force and reality. But he found that the favourites of his

youth, Athos, Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan, had power to amuse him still. And there was the book of devotions ready at hand in case he should find himself equal to any spiritual exercises.

It had been on the Tuesday that Laszinski's visit to Palazzo Nasoni had occurred, and on the following Friday the old Princess came across the courtyard to see her son. She came to inquire after his health, and made him endure a long homily on the vanity of earthly pleasures. He listened with unusual meekness. Nay, more, he listened to her when she broached a proposition (made now for the third time) by an illustrious kinsman, to pay all his debts,—on one condition. The illustrious kinsman was very illustrious. He had Imperial Austrian blood in his veins: for the Nasonis counted among their not very distant relatives one of the dispossessed Princes of Italy. It had been discussed more than once in august circles whether there could not be found a way to arrange "Max's" affairs: the said affairs causing periodical scandals and an unpleasant paragraph which made the round of certain European newspapers with a regularity worthy of a more celestial orbit. The difficulty of "arranging Max's affairs" (in plebeian language, compounding with his creditors) consisted in the condition which the illustrious kinsman insisted on annexing to his "arrange-

ment." Prince Massimo was to receive an annual allowance, and to resign into the hands of his son the entire management of what family property still remained. The Prince had hitherto combated this project, by which, as he said with naïve egotism, his creditors and his son would chiefly benefit; whilst he remained trammelled within the limits of a narrow income, and deprived of the chance of making any fresh debts.

But on the occasion of his mother's visit he absolutely appeared inclined to consider the proposition. This phenomenon, although agreeable to the old Princess Teresa from one point of view, yet, coupled with the sight of the book of devotion, aroused her maternal anxiety. She thought that the two together intimated that Massimo must be seriously unwell. And she resolved, besides offering up special prayers to Santa Filomena, to send for her own physician. For it was proper to neglect no precautions; and, perhaps, it was too much to expect that Santa Filomena should undertake the case quite unassisted.

However, as the days passed, and Laszinski made no sign, the Prince began to recover his spirits. By the time that Monday morning arrived he even ventured to open a newspaper, and to cast his eyes over its columns as he sipped his chocolate. The journal which lay on

the Prince's breakfast-table every morning was an extremely well written and ably edited print. It enjoyed the reputation of being the organ of an influential party in the Vatican. But it by no means confined its labours to propagating items of other-worldly intelligence for the edification of the devout. It was usually very well informed as to what was going on in mundane circles; and it even occasionally printed the sensational details of various crimes and misdemeanours; no doubt with the laudable aim of pointing the contrast between the present wicked times and those good old days when such things never happened; or when, at all events, there was no pestilent free Press to say anything about them.

The Prince first read the leading article, which was a strong attack against the project of legalizing divorce which at that time was being talked of in Parlimentary circles. He shifted the double eyeglass which had become necessary to him in reading (much to his chagrin), and nodded his head with an expression of the warmest assent. "Marriage is no mere civil contract, but a holy tie which the Church must sanctify by her benediction, thus consecrating the only safe basis of society." "Most true! Extremely true!" said the Prince to himself. "Divorce is absolutely a social dissolvent. Pray Heaven that we Romans, at least, may not be forced to leave so fatal a heritage to our children!"

He felt a certain glow of complacency at finding his own sentiments so thoroughly in accord with the views of the Clerical journalist. And he folded over the journal, and proceeded in his reading with a sense of moral elevation which was extremely comforting.

"*Mysterious murder.*" That was the heading of a paragraph which next attracted Prince Massimo's attention. And he read as follows:

"The whole neighbourhood of the Vicolo della Lupa (an obscure alley in Trastevere) was thrown into great excitement on Sunday morning by the discovery of a murder which presents several singular and mysterious features. A foreigner, who has been lodging in the topmost story of a poor house there, was found stabbed to the heart in the chamber he occupied. The medical experts declare he must have been dead at least twelve hours when the body was discovered about ten o'clock on Sunday morning. The landlady, a poor widow, had reason to suspect that her lodger, who owed her long arrears of rent, had some intention of running away without paying her. Receiving no answer to repeated knockings and callings on the Sunday morning, and finding the door locked, she caused it to be broken open, fearing that her lodger had secretly gone off in the night. He must, in fact, have intended to do so, for a small valise was found ready packed by his side, and he seems to have been on the point of leaving the house when the assassin or assassins surprised him·

The police are of opinion that the deed could not have been accomplished single-handed. No sound of a struggle was heard. Nor can any of the inmates remember to have seen strangers on the staircase. But this latter circumstance is of small importance, as it would have been perfectly possible for a man to climb up the dark staircase without meeting any one, or without being seen sufficiently well to be recognized. The murder must have been due to motives of vengeance and not of robbery, for a considerable sum of money in Italian bank-notes, as well as a silver watch, were found on the body. The weapon, a triangular-bladed dagger of peculiar manufacture, was left in the wound. And we are informed that attached to the haft was found a paper with some words on it in the Russian language. But for obvious reasons it is not desirable to say more on this point at present. The murderer or murderers must have locked the door after perpetrating the crime, and carried away the key with them. The countenance of the deceased bears an expression of terror and anxiety. The eyes are wide open and staring, and one hand convulsively clutches a loaded cane. The body is that of a tall powerfully-built man, apparently between fifty and sixty years of age. No papers whatever were found on the body or in the room. It is suspected that some may have been removed by the assassins. In a leathern pocket-book containing the bank-notes, were found also two printed visiting cards, bearing the inscription, 'ALEXIS SMITH-MÜLLER, *Colonel en retraite, Bala Palanka, Serbie.*' We

understand that no such person is known at the Servian Legation. The police are prosecuting active inquiries. But up to the time of going to press no clue had been obtained to the perpetrators of this extraordinary crime."

It may be stated at once that, whether a clue was ever found or not, the perpetrators of the crime were never arrested. One or two persons in Rome at the time were well convinced on excellent grounds that the death of Laszinski had been decreed by a society of Russian Nihilists to whom he had played traitor, and carried out by emissaries despatched from Geneva for that purpose. But those one or two persons took care to keep their conviction to themselves.

Prince Massimo Nasoni was overwhelmed by such a flood of conflicting emotions on reading the above account that he fell ill in earnest, and lay for some weeks in a nervous fever. He was haunted by a horrible suspicion that Nina had been privy to this crime. As to Guarini's guilty knowledge of the matter he had scarcely any doubt. A revolutionist like that would stick at nothing. And who had so large an interest as Guarini in Laszinski's death? Massimo absolutely felt himself hampered in settling his own spiritual scores with his confessor, by the idea that he might be in some sort an accessary after the fact by

keeping his suspicions to himself. At length, one day, when his strength was much prostrated by fever, and his spirit much depressed by a long interview with his mother's Director, a stern, severe ecclesiastic of the ascetic type, the poor Prince began to fear that he was in danger of dying forthwith. And he sent a hastily scrawled line in that sense to Nina Guarini, begging her to come and see him. She obeyed the summons, and the two were face to face once more.

The Prince in a tremulous voice, and with considerable hesitation—for it was more difficult than he had foreseen to speak with Nina's grave pale face before him, and Nina's earnest honest eyes looking into his,—exhorted her to seek pardon and reconciliation with Mother Church; and above all if there were any secret which burthened her mind, to make amends and do penance. Nina at first thought his mind was wandering in fever. But his meaning presently began to dawn upon her.

"I can't get absolution myself, with this thing on my mind," said Massimo, looking at her fretfully with haggard eyes, and then turning his head away on the pillow. Nina stood at the bedside regarding him with grave contemptuous pity. "I think," she said at length, "that you suspect me of complicity with a murder."

He started up wildly and laid his hand on her mouth. "No, no; not complicity!" he cried. "For mercy's sake don't say such words!"

"I might more justly implore you for mercy's sake not to think such thoughts. But you cannot help them. I see you now as you are; and I am sorry, not angry." Then she bent down and spoke more softly in his ear. "Listen! Of the details of that deed I *know* no more than all the world knows. But many circumstances make me believe that the man Casimir Laszinski" (she uttered the name with a cutting clearness which made Massimo wince nervously as though a sharp lancet had been flashed too near his face), "was killed by some former comrades in conspiracy whom he had betrayed, as he betrayed every human being who trusted him, from his youth upward. I am not a murderess, Max,—not even in intention."

She was turning to go away, when he said faintly, but with an obvious expression of relief on his face, "We may never see each other again, Nina. I am very ill."

She looked at him quietly. "Oh no," she answered. "You have been frightened. You have not much moral courage or fortitude. I say my last farewell to you, here and now; but you may look forward to confessing a great many more sins to your priest before you die."

Massimo tried—really tried—to be mournfully affected by the thought that he had had his last interview with Nina Guarini. But no sooner was the door shut behind her than he took up a little ivory hand mirror from the table at his side, and looked at his own image more hopefully than he had done for some days past. "I am pulled down, undoubtedly," he said to himself. "But Nina evidently did not think me in danger. She would not have deceived me. She was always sincere." And from that hour he began to mend with great rapidity.

And so these two drifted asunder. And the currents of the air and the water carried them apart once more on the Ocean of Life.

Three years later William Chester came home from India. He had gone back there almost immediately after accompanying Violet and her aunt to England, not caring to take the full holiday he had promised himself. Work was best for him, he said. "That's Mr. Chester's way of curing the troubles of the mind," observed Kitty Low confidentially to Miss Baines. "Ah, it's a grand sight, a man as stands up and faces his trouble, and fights it out, and holds his tongue!"

William Chester had certainly faced his trouble and held his tongue. Before he parted from Violet she had

learned all the dreadful truth about Mario's death. And the dumb despair into which it plunged her had alarmed them all. She scarcely shed a tear; but would sit for hours in apparent lethargy, neither speaking nor moving, but with an expression of settled misery on her face that was heart-breaking. The faithful Kitty it was who first devised the means of breaking this dead calm which seemed to threaten her reason. "She wants a word from some one as was fond of him," said Kitty. "We may speak as fair and soft as we like, but she knows that in our hearts we can't help but blame that unfortunate fellow-creature, and our words are no comfort to her. You just get the Signora to write to her telling all particulars. Don't be afraid of that doing her harm. Anything is better than letting her brood over her own fancies. The Signora liked the poor misguided Captain, and was kind to him. And besides she hasn't got her mind so full of the right and wrong of it as we have. She looks at human beings more as we look at weather—something that must be taken as it is, and can't be mended."

Kitty's prescription was found to answer admirably. Nina Guarini was most thankful to receive the permission to write freely and fully to Violet, and she sent the girl a long letter. This opened the floodgates of her tears, and she wept passionately—wept herself to

sleep in fact, with the letter clasped in her hand, and fell into an unbroken slumber that lasted many hours.

"After that she'll do," said Kitty. "It's only a question of time now. Young hearts are like young bones: a breakage ain't so fatal. They're elastic, and soon knit up again. Nature don't let folks die of a broken heart at twenty years old."

Nature did not let Violet die. But she suffered keenly and long, for her character was tenacious, and the blow had been very terrible. But she read and re-read the two letters which Nina had enclosed in her own: one of these was Mario's last epistle to Nina, and the other was Chester's letter to him offering assistance. If William Chester had made any attempt to speak again of love, if he had even remained near at hand, Violet might have shrunk from him. But as the weeks and months passed, and her young strong frame recovered its healthy tone, the clear honesty of her conscience asserted itself. This man was true and brave and generous and simple, not a story-book hero; neither a paladin nor a saint; but a man who could put himself aside for the sake of another, who scorned to flinch from his duty, and was gentle because he was strong.

He wrote frequently to Aunt Betsy, telling her the minutest details of his life in exile, as he called it.

And he sometimes added a little word to Violet, such as a kind brother might have written—nothing more. But Violet thought of him more often and more tenderly as the months went by.

One good result of her thinking was the resolve to imitate her Cousin William in his unselfish care for others. She had always been affectionate to her Aunt Betsy, but with a certain wilfulness. Henceforward she tended her with the devotion of a daughter; and uncomplainingly accompanied her to such winter resorts as she could be induced to visit for her health's sake. Torquay or St. Leonard's formed the utmost limits of Miss Baines's travels, for she could never be induced to cross the British Channel again as long as she lived. And Uncle Joshua, approving this resolution, could not refrain from pointing the moral to his niece Betsy, observing that she could now see what good had ever come of her mania for foreign parts; and bidding her in future rely wholly on his judgment, which had been proved to be (for all purposes of guiding the conduct of his female relatives) practically infallible.

But to Violet he never made any such speeches. Her uncle's goodness to her, indeed, touched her deeply. Taught in this one case by that great master of courtesy, the heart, Mr. Higgins was almost delicate in his consideration for Violet. Jane Higgins found herself

reduced very unmistakably to the second place in her husband's regard (if, indeed, she had ever occupied any other), and gave up struggling against her rival, on receiving a distinct intimation from her lord and master that his testamentary dispositions on her — Jane Higgins's—behalf, would entirely depend on her behaviour towards his great-niece. And so the years went by, and now William Chester was coming home. Whether he were coming home to stay, or whether he would go back to India, seemed uncertain. "It depends," replied Miss Baines oracularly to an inquiry on the subject from Mrs. Joshua Higgins. And being pressed further, gave a nervous glance at Violet, and added "on circumstances."

One June day, Violet, sitting under a branching elm in Dozebury churchyard, saw a well-known figure approaching her along the dappled shadows of the avenue: a figure with a sunburnt face and honest grey eyes, and one or two lines across the forehead that had not been there when they parted. She stood up white and trembling; and when he came close to her—very calmly as to his outward aspect, but with a wildly beating heart—she held out both her hands and looked at him with such a smile, although the tears were pouring down her cheeks, that he cried, with a sudden radiance on his face, "Oh Violet,—my love!"

"If you will have me, dear," she answered. And he clasped her to his heart.

And thus they met again on the wide sea of life, and thenceforth held their course together to the last haven.

Years afterwards, Violet, musing with her hand on the head of her little fair-haired son, would thank God reverently, who had given her such sweet calm after tempest. The sorrowful story of her first love came to be like a child's memory of some tale of wonder, whereof no faintest misty outline, no dark or rosy tint, can ever change. For it was removed from the ceaseless corrosion of things actual;—that tireless tide of To-day, that laps away granite, and piles up sand, and changes all the world. That strange, sad story was safe in the immutable Past. And Violet, pressing her boy to her breast and listening for her husband's homeward step, would think of the girl who had loved and lost so piteously, as a different being from the happy wife and mother who sate there; and would remember with a soft compassion how they two had met and parted like Ships upon the Sea.

THE END.

Bungay: Clay and Taylor, Printers. S. & H.

New Novels at all Libraries.

NEW NOVEL BY THE AUTHOR OF "BREEZIE LANGTON."

HARD LINES. By CAPT. HAWLEY SMART. 3 vols. *In the Press.*

NEW NOVEL BY MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED.

MOLOCH; A STORY OF SACRIFICE. By MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED. 3 vols.

A NEW NOVEL BY JOSEPH HATTON.

MODERN ULYSSES. By JOSEPH HATTON, Author of "Clytie," &c. 3 vols.

A NEW NOVEL BY HAWLEY SMART.

AT FAULT. By HAWLEY SMART, Author of "Breezie Langton," "The Great Tontine," &c., &c. 3 vols.

"The public will find his story extremely interesting, and in some parts vigorous; its plot will hold their attention to the very last."—*Academy.*

NEW NOVEL BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

ELI'S CHILDREN. By GEORGE MANVILLE FENN, Author of "Parson o' Dumford." 3 vols. Second Edition.

"Mr. Fenn's studies have gained for him a reputation in a field where George Eliot and Anthony Trollope have worked before him. . . . His pictures are always pleasing, and full of observation."—*Athenæum.*

A LINCOLNSHIRE HEROINE. By EDWIN WHELPTON. 3 vols.

"Is bright, readable, and highly interesting from beginning to end. The people introduced by the author are real living entities, with strongly marked individualities, and we feel that we know them well as we follow the author's pleasant story. 'A Lincolnshire Heroine' is certainly one of the books to be read."—*Society.*

CHAPMAN & HALL, LIMITED, 11, HENRIETTA ST., W.C.

New Novels at all Libraries.

THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM.

By RALPH IRON. 2 vols.

"'The Story of an African Farm' shows considerable power. Mr. Iron has followed no recognized model of romance, but contrives to tell his tale in a series of studies illustrating the wild life of an ostrich farm, and setting before the reader, with striking vigour, the problems which trouble a strong intelligence and an imaginative ambition remote from any possibility of culture. His descriptions are wonderfully graphic, and his pathos is forcible. . . . Mr. Iron obviously writes about what he knows with a successful result which is well deserved."—*Athenæum.*

"One of the most interesting and original of recent books is 'The Story of an African Farm' by Ralph Iron. It is a veritable story of South African colonial life, Boers, Hottentots, Kaffirs, Dutchmen, sheep, ostriches, and all, and would be excellent reading, if only for the vivid, graphic pictures it presents of a sort of life not yet made too familiar by books of travel, and scarcely touched at all by fiction. . . . The story is, in every part, a remarkable one. The force and stress of its emotion, its saturnine humour, the ample sympathy with religious beliefs from which the writer has himself long parted, and the intense perception of modern deprivation of grounded faith are each so powerful as to master the reader by turns and leave him undetermined as to which of them the author is strongest in. We have seldom read a story which held so much between its first page and its last."—*Daily News.*

"There are many passages of great merit in this book. Lyndall's cynical speech, in the second volume, on woman's position, which begins with—'Look at this little chin of mine with the dimple in it: it is but a small part of my person, but though I had knowledge of all things under the sun, and the deep loving heart of an angel, it would not stead me like this little chin'—will of itself justify us in recommending all and sundry to read 'The Story of an African Farm.'"—*St. James's Gazette.*

COSMO GORDON. By MRS. LEITH ADAMS,

Author of "Aunt Hepsy's Foundling." 3 vols.

"In one all-important respect, Mrs. Adams stands nearly alone among lady writers. She knows how to write a love-story without mistaking flirtation for passion, or forgetting that life is made up of many matters, whereof love is only one. Her novels are chapters of real human nature, observed at first hand, and therefore always worth reading."—*Globe.*

NADINE; THE STORY OF A WOMAN.

By MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED, Author of "An Australian Heroine." New and Cheaper Edition. 1 vol., 5*s.*

"In this charming little book Mrs. Praed has fully kept up to the high level reached in 'Policy and Passion.' . . . . The book is one of the cleverest we have read for a long time."—*Vanity Fair.*

"Mrs. Campbell Praed's story remains a psychological study of singular power and originality. Her hold on the attention of the reader is never relaxed."—*Daily News.*

CHAPMAN & HALL, LIMITED, 11, HENRIETTA ST., W.C.